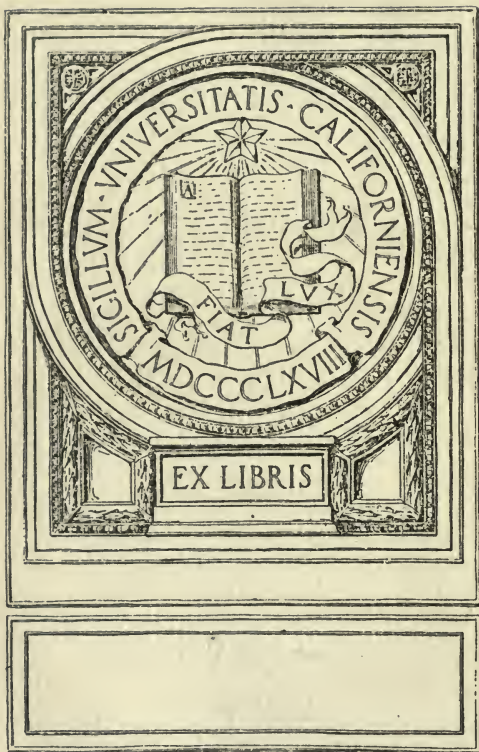
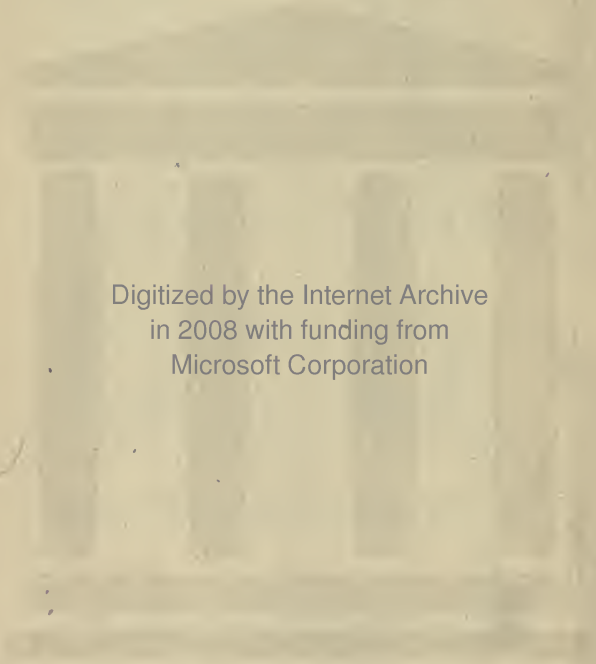




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The Curtain of Steel



The
Curtain of Steel

by
Wm. J. Harrison

BY THE
AUTHOR OF
IN THE NORTHERN MISTS
GRAND FLEET DAYS
NAVAL INTELLIGENCE



HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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PREFACE

HERE we have a Long Naval Film, in Six Reels, and every single one of the pictures is photographed from life.

Excepting, of course, the shortest reel of the six, the one which is called *The Curtain Raised*; that, happily, is untrue, every word of it, and even the setting in which the story is told is pure fiction. But I put it in as the best I could do to try and show what would happen if there wasn't any British Navy. I know it is rather a feeble effort, but you can let your own imagination do the rest.

But while all the other pictures are really quite true, the portraits are all of them faked. I want to make this very clear indeed, because there are lots of people who when they read a book of this kind think they can recognise their own photographs. Well, they needn't think so here, because all the faces that appear on the film, like all the names, are "made up out of my own head."

Preface

Of course, it is impossible, I suppose, to avoid altogether making what is termed a "composite portrait" when trying to invent the characters in a book; memories of different people one has known, traits and features picked out one here and another there and pieced together must inevitably furnish the raw material, and the source of such separate constituents may sometimes be recognised. But, taking the completed characters as they stand, nobody means anybody—to put it elegantly and tersely.

There is only one part-exception where one man's face stands out rather more clearly from the others with which it is blended; it is the face of a good man, and I hope I have written nicely about him.

So now we know exactly where we are, and let's begin!

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I. The Lowering of the Curtain

I. The Lowering of the Curtain

1

AN order from the Admiralty—brief, swift, and secret; so secret that even now, so long a time after, I do not know whether it came in the form of a wireless message in cypher, or as a single code word transmitted by letter and intimating that a certain secret envelope was to be opened, or whether some special messenger came speeding down by the express, with the destinies of nations tucked away in his coat pocket next to his cigar case. In one way or another the order came, the order which was to loose the great ships from their moorings and send them, squadron by squadron, up the Channel and round the Forelands, then to North and North-west for hundreds of miles, with an unknown fate ahead of them in the months and the years that were to follow; making for their base, which at that time was but the raw material

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of a base, a mere harbour just as nature made it, so little were we prepared for war or expecting it ; without shore fortifications to defend the anchorage, without nets to protect the harbour entrances, without minefields to hold up a possible enemy.

There is no need for any mystery-mongering about the identity of this embryonic base : all the world knows that Scapa Flow in the Orkneys was the objective for which the Grand Fleet made when it quietly disappeared from its South Coast ports that portentous July day.

Well was it for Britain that she possessed that magnificent natural war-harbour far up in the North ; for the East Coast of both Scotland and England, spared from fierce inroads such as the wild breakers of the Atlantic have made on the Western and Southern shores, tearing with their terrible white fingers at the heart of the land, remains whole and unbroken by any considerable harbour from the Pentland Firth to the Straits of Dover. Only this distant island anchorage exists, a tiny inland sea embraced by the encircling isles of the Southern Orkneys ; yet so amazingly well adapted in every imaginable respect for the needs of a fleet in time of war that one might almost think it specially designed and given by God for the protection of our country against a foe on the opposite shores of the North Sea.

Here, then, the Fleet arrived, unknown to everybody in the kingdom except a very few, and those mostly at the Admiralty. All that the generality

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of people knew was that the ships which they had seen the day before had mysteriously and silently disappeared, and that the local festivities were suddenly cut short.

But while people were still wondering what had become of the ships, the Fleet had arrived at Scapa. There it anchored, and awaited events.

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It was the lowering of the Safety Curtain. From the moment when the cables rattled out through the hawse-holes, sending a cloud of the dried mud of Weymouth Bay into the air of the Orkneys, England was safe, happen what might.

Secure in their seats in front of the curtain, and blissfully ignorant of what was happening behind the scenes, the audience chattered idly, and wondered in a spirit of complete detachment what turn the great European play would next take.

Behind the curtain the awful conflagration was already ablaze. Not yet had it spread to the stage. Though burning fiercely, there still seemed hopes that it might be kept under. Men were trying to quench it with little buckets of water; others were merely talking. And few realised how great the danger was. Those few who did realise it, however, knew that the whole of the theatre was one mass of dry rot, just tinder ready to blaze up wherever a chance spark should fall, so that

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the only question was how soon the whole would be afire.

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When the ships received that quiet summons for their voyage northwards they had but barely dispersed from the great Naval Review at Spithead.

At the time when this function was held it was considered the great naval event of the year—so unable is poor purblind humanity to see an inch beyond its nose. The great event of the year, when all the time those ghastly fires were smouldering and the moment for their bursting into frightful flames was even now very, very close at hand !

Yet if we can forget for a moment how very wise we now are after the event, and eliminate our sense of proportion, the Spithead Review really was a big thing. There had been several great naval reviews in the same place before, but never anything at all approaching this for magnificence on the grand scale. The lines of ships were so long that from even the most favourable position it was not possible to see them from end to end. And there were many of these lines, comprising ships of all classes, from great Super-Dreadnoughts to the tiny specks of destroyers seen in the distance. It really was a most impressive and inspiring scene.

A thoughtful naval officer made the remark: "It is a pity that the Kaiser isn't here to see this. No doubt he has a paper knowledge of the size of our Fleet, but if only he could actually be here and

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see for himself with his own eyes, he would never dream of the madness of going to war with England ! ”

“ The Kaiser isn’t here, but his eyes are,” was the reply of his still more thoughtful companion, “ he has many pairs of eyes, everywhere, and many of them here, beyond all shadow of doubt. The Eyes will go back to Germany and make the Kaiser see what they have seen. He will not make war on us ! ”

But neither of these two thoughtful officers was quite thoughtful enough.

Perhaps, though, they were right, so far as their reflexions went. Maybe the Eyes *did* go back to Germany and make the Kaiser see what they had seen ; and possibly he came to the conclusion that it would be madness to provoke to war the nation that possessed such a mighty Fleet as this. That would partly explain his rage and bitter disappointment when England decided to step into the conflict, not waiting for him to say whether she should or should not fight.

You must understand that to the average naval officer this review at Spithead was an appalling weariness of the flesh, a period of the most intense boredom, and when it was over a great sigh of relief and thankfulness went up from every single ship in the Fleet.

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I daresay you will find it difficult to believe this, especially if you happen to be one of those many who came off from the shore to take part in the innumerable minor festivities on board the various ships—tea-parties, luncheon-parties, small dances, and the like.

To your eyes everything was *so* delightful, from the moment you stepped into one of “those dear little steam-boats” under the guidance of “a perfectly sweet little midddy” who issued his orders with all the dignity and responsibility of a full admiral.

If only you could have seen those same dear little steam-boats a few weeks later, with a three-pounder gun mounted for’ard and the tiny cabin, in which clean bright-hued flags had been spread above the cushions for you, now chock-a-block with ammunition, rifles, and other horrid gear of war! While the snotties in command, looking grimmer now with the sense of a far deeper responsibility, steered their boats through the troubled waters of the Flow, straining their eyes on the look-out for the periscope of any such submarine as might be bold enough to try and steal into the harbour!

You went on board, and still found everything delightful. Your hosts were charming, the ship was a picture of sweet cleanliness, the polished bright-work winked at you in the sun, and the enamelled turrets so beautifully smooth and fresh that the Commander *almost* frowned when in an unguarded

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moment you put your gloved hand on that dazzling expanse of grey glory !

But, perhaps, the biggest thrill of all was when you were taken down below to see a certain cabin. Such a perfectly entrancing little room, and so different from what you had imagined—not a bit like a cabin in a liner. A tiny room, and yet withal so homelike ! The bunk just beneath the scuttle—the “window,” you called it—and covered with an embroidered bunk-spread worked by hands that put something besides needle-craft into the task. Cupboards and drawers everywhere, enough of them to raise envy in the breast of the most house-proud woman living, and yet all of them so cunningly devised and so cleverly fitted that they did not in any way prevent the cabin from looking a little *salon*. Flowered chintz curtains shielded the doorway and the little round window ; photographs in silver frames were on the chest of drawers and the knee-hole table, together with many a curious and interesting trifle which you simply had to pick up and examine and ask questions about, because you felt perfectly sure that there was a story attached to them all !

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Not all cabins were of this picturesquely fascinating type. There was one in our ship belonging to the Muddled Oaf—I went along to it with him and Marjorie Daw and her mother, in the course of

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one of those afternoon entertainments. I knew that my part was to look after Mrs. Daw, though the Oaf had not expressed any such purpose when he invited me to make one of the party; that was because he did not know that he was in love with Marjorie Daw—not then. Marjorie knew it, of course. All that the Oaf said was: "I say, old man, I've got some females coming off to tea to-morrow, and you've got to come and help me out with it. I never know what to say to women—they're a damn nuisance on board a ship, anyway, but these have been rather decent to me so I've got to do the polite, and have 'em off. We'll push them to the beach again as soon as possible."

"Well, I hope you'll tell your servant to tidy up your cabin," I had said. "It's in a beastly mess—smells like a fishmonger's shop that's been shut up over a hot Sunday."

"Oh, that's only my lug-worms," said the Oaf. "I was going to bait my new line, seven hundred and fifty hooks, and lay it out last night, but I forgot. I daresay the bait niffs a bit by now. I'll have 'em chucked away. Pity, though; if it hadn't been for these confounded females I would have had a shy at using those lug-worms to-night. They can't all be dead yet!"

He did have his cabin cleaned up, partially, but nothing could alter its close resemblance to a marine dealer's store. Oilskins and sea-boots and fishing-tackle were all over the place; there was no carpet on the deck—the Oaf had rolled it up and shoved

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it in a corner because he found the bare corticene more convenient when he splashed about in his tin bath; and the bunk had no more ornamental covering than the white Marcella quilt kindly provided by the Admiralty, and even this, I regret to say, was not very white, as the Oaf was in the habit of using his bunk as a table when baiting his line with lug-worms or when engaged in any other equally messy occupation.

Marjorie Daw took all this in at one glance; and even I could see in her eyes the laughing, tender, tearful, mothering look which showed how she longed to look after this great helpless baby; it only shone for an instant and disappeared, and she was her gay light-hearted self again. But I also saw her hand rest for a second on the pillow which lay at the head of the bunk, naked and unashamed in its service pillow-case of coarse unbleached calico, as though the Oaf might feel something left by that little loving touch when his head rested there that night.

6

Yet the whole affair was, as I have said, distinctly and intensely boring, except to a few who were a good deal deeper in love than the Muddled Oaf, and consequently welcomed the idea of meeting their affinities on board. The married officers wanted to get ashore and go home to their wives, the Old Nuggets became more nuggetty than ever because

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the sanctity of the wardroom was invaded and their afternoon caulk rendered impossible, and the unattached officers of every grade and age ungallantly resented their ship being turned into a giddy White City with the whole of the routine going to blazes !

Chief amongst those exceptional people who really did enjoy the Review were the young snotties and the newly-promoted Acting-Subs, who welcomed the chance of conducting visitors and friends around their ships with all the pride and enthusiasm of a showman who is at the same time a proprietor. Of course, any such exhibition of keen delight was far beneath the dignity of those officers who had attained the real rank of Sub-Lieutenant of the "confirmed" not "acting" variety ; and, in fact, the greatest degree of pride of possession was found in those who had but a few days previously been drafted to the Fleet from the Cadets' College at Osborne.

Two of these, Palliser and Cordery, were well known to me. I met them ashore together one afternoon just before the Review. Palliser had been appointed to the *Formidable*, and Cordery to the *Hogue*, and they were engaged in a heated argument as to the merits of their respective types of ships. You would have thought, to listen to them, that they had lived for years on board these vessels.

"When all's said and done, yours is not really a *fighting* ship like ours. *We* stand up to the enemy

and pound him with our twelve-inch guns. What can *you* do with a couple of nine-point-twos ? ”

“ Pooh ! Everybody knows that if you want to see life you must go to a cruiser ! While you lumbering old slow-coaches are waddling about somewhere in the background, we cruisers cut ahead and have a smack at the enemy, and as often as not finish him off before you have a chance to come on the scene ! ”

“ Well, I’ll back the good old *Formidable* against your tin pot, any day ! ”

“ That shows how little you know about ships ! Look at our speed ! Why, we could make rings round you. We could dash in and sink you and be off again before you had realised what was happening. Cruisers are *it*, mark my words ! ”

Cordery went down with the *Hogue*, and Palliser was one of the survivors of the *Formidable* ; he came to us afterwards. Both cruiser and battleship proved equally vulnerable to the deadly torpedo.

We had, in fact, to make a mental readjustment of values before the war had been very long in progress, and were awakened to the painful realisation that the greater portion of that vast assemblage of ships at Spithead was no more than scrap-iron ; though, with our characteristic national obstinacy we refused to acknowledge this fact, and went on using the obsolete ships as if they were the very latest super-Dreadnoughts, with boundless credit to the ships themselves and immense benefit to the nation and empire.

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Fortunately, at the head of the line, we possessed an almost new Navy constructed on the most up-to-date lines, greatly outnumbering anything that the Germans could put up of a similar type, embracing all the most modern contrivances for offence and defence, and yet not so new that they had not already established a reputation for gunnery efficiency and for manœuvring in company—the two chief essentials of a fighting fleet.

7

It was to these modern vessels that the eventful summons came. They were at their home base, and had settled down to routine again after the upsetting interlude of the Review.

The liberty men were ashore, enjoying themselves after their usual fashion in the music halls and the public-houses, or parading the streets and looking at the shop windows; some had their homes in the port, and had been given all-night leave. Not a few of the officers, also, had gone home to their wives and families, and had no thought of anything interfering with their intention to come off by the eight o'clock boat next morning, according to custom.

To find all these scattered officers and men was the work chiefly of the masters-at-arms and ships' corporals, who were sent ashore to seek them out and fetch them all on board.

Ships' police appear to possess an uncanny know-

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ledge of the habits and haunts of the members of their ships' companies almost amounting to the powers of a diviner. In reality, it is evidence of the keen interest which they take in their work and in the men with whom they have to deal.

On this occasion they went at once, as if by instinct, to the exact spots where all the men were to be found, and had them all down at the pier-head, waiting for the boats to come to take them off to their ships, within a couple of hours.

Who can ever forget the excitement of that evening, when on the stage of the music hall appeared suddenly the well-known figure of "Jaunty," with a message to the sailors in the audience that they were to repair on board immediately?

And, indeed, sailors composed the greater part of the audience. They had been roaring the choruses of sentimental and comic songs with great stolidity and vim, but their voices changed now to a buzz of eagerness and questioning as they rose in their places and left the hall in a body. The poor artistes who had sweated in their endeavours to please their bluejacket audience were left deserted and forgotten in the greater excitement which, for once, real life had to offer as a counter-attraction to the allurements of the stage. "What was the buzz? Had Germany declared war on England? Had England declared war on Germany? Were we really going to chip in?"

While these men were being collected, other members of the resourceful ships' police were going

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from house to house and from street to street, gathering their ships' companies by ones and twos. Some of the officers had their homes in the suburbs. To reach these recourse had to be made to motor cars; and out along the broad high roads and through many a country lane that night the darkness was pierced by the flashing headlights of cars at high speed, empty on the outward journey, and returning with a load of naval officers picked up at one place and another. Some of these officers had been in bed and asleep when the car drew up outside their darkened houses and tooted noisily to awake them. Many a wife arose that night frightened and apprehensive, and still in her night-gear helped her sleepy husband to tumble into his clothes and hastily cram some gear into a hand-bag; and a few minutes afterwards, when the front door had banged and the noise of the swiftly-departing car had faded into silence, turned again to her lonely bed and pressed her weeping eyes into the pillow.

The wives knew that war was coming!

8

Eastwards along the English Channel, with all lights out, the great ships went, keeping station through the darkness of the calm July night, squadron by squadron, each led by its flagship.

This incomparable Fleet represented the might of Britain; yet to the average inhabitant of these isles probably none of the ships were known by

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name, except, perhaps, the ship which had revolutionised the world's navies, the *Dreadnought*, prototype of all modern battleships, herself already obsolescent and the least powerful unit in all that mighty armada.

The *Iron Duke* was there, soon to be known to all men as the Fleet Flagship, the floating home of the Commander-in-Chief; and the *Marlborough*, her sister ship—the two most recent triumphs of ship construction. There also were the eight ships of the famous Second Battle Squadron of those days, headed by their flagship the *King George V.*, scarcely less recent in their design than the *Iron Duke* and the *Marlborough*, yet of an age sufficient to have welded them into a homogeneous entity, and won for them a reputation for the finest gunnery efficiency and perfect tactical skill, so that they held undisputed place as the most powerful battle squadron in all the world.

After these came other great fighting-ships, super-Dreadnoughts of various older classes, such as the *Neptune*, *Colossus*, *Collingwood*, *Bellerophon*, *Temeraire* and many another. Mighty ships, all of them, though less heavily gunned and in other respects not quite attaining to the capabilities of their newer companions.

Nor were the swift and powerful battle-cruisers lacking, ships that could act as "Eyes of the Fleet" and at the same time strike, and strike hard.

Altogether, the Fleet that steamed away eastward and northward was the most powerful naval fight-

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ing force that the world had ever seen. Looking back upon it from the present day it seems almost small and inconsiderable, seeing that it has been, roughly speaking, doubled since that day ; but even then it was far more powerful than the German Fleet, either as a whole or ship for ship.

The whole of this force, at that time known as the Home Fleet, and not yet having received its new title *The Grand Fleet*, was commanded by Admiral Sir George Callaghan. He was very shortly to relinquish his command ; and his last cruise at sea was undertaken in performing this most fearfully responsible task of leading the Fleet in safety to Scapa Flow, an honourable and fitting close to an honoured career ; before relaxing its grasp of power and drawing down the curtain over a life of active service, his was the hand that steadily and surely drew down the Safety Curtain of our nation and empire.

9

Meanwhile the flames had taken such a hold that they were now quite unmanageable ; though not yet had they burst through the flimsy scenery and spread to the stage where they could be seen in all their fearfulness.

The audience still looked idly at the scene where strutted diplomatists, financiers, royal personages, journalists, and all the other familiar puppets of the hackneyed political play.

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Some heard the distant roaring of the flames, and guessed, and feared; yet feared still more to create a panic amongst the rest of the audience.

Little need to trouble about the chance of panic taking hold of the people! The vast majority of them had not the intelligence to realise the danger. Even when the raging fire made its way to the stage where it could be seen of all men, they only admired the spectacular effect and were inclined to welcome it as something new and more interesting than the dull play they had seen so many times before.

10

At last a more lively apprehension seized upon the people, as matters began to look more and more serious.

Various were the counsels offered, chiefly by the irresponsible. Some, led by a great London newspaper, advised that England should keep out of the War, and make a big profit by trading on highly advantageous terms with both sides in the struggle. These were the people who became the profiteers and food hoarders of later days. Oh, how the men of the Fleet writhed and shook with white rage when they read these despicable counsels!

Hotham, our Captain of Marines, was even more than usually explosive with respect to these mean hucksterers. I will not quote all his words, because a good many of them though appropriate enough in a wardroom mess would not look quite

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so well in cold print. But the gist of his remarks was, "Why the Lower Regions should we risk our carmine-coloured lives to defend such a Gehenna-destined crew of loathsome-scented skunks as these? Consign to perdition my sainted soul, if these quite unmentionable individuals represent the average Englishman, then all I can say is we must be in a fairly putrescent state, and the sooner the Germans take over the country and clean it up the better!"

"Buck up, old man," said our Padre, who was quite accustomed to the Marine Captain's ornate vocabulary, and was not at all shocked by it, reckoning it as a mere trick of verbal effervescence like the sensible little man he was. "Buck up, old man, and keep calm. England's all right. These people you complain about are just the Little Souls, the spiritual dwarfs of the nation, and you mustn't take them for samples of the people at large any more than you would take the physical dwarfs and monstrosities as typical. Every country possesses its quota of these Little Souls; it's a million to one that some explosive Hauptman in Germany is at this very moment slinging off in your own florid Gothic style against a similar set of skunks in his own country."

"That's quite enough from you, Bish," retorted Hotham. "We've unfortunately got to listen quietly while you drivel at us on Sundays, but I'm dashed if I'm going to stand a second sermon from you in the middle of the week!"

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With this he hurled three fat volumes of Chambers's Encyclopædia at the reverend gentleman's stomach; and the little member of the Church Militant, gleefully welcoming the opportunity of a scrap, retaliated by hurling himself bodily at the shoulders of the tall marine, where he clung like a clerical counterpart of the Old Man of the Sea. Subsequent proceedings found them both violently projected through the wardroom door to the deck of the flat outside; where they forgot all about the wars and rumours of wars in the more personally interesting incident of their own urgent private affairs.

Exactly as a vast number of other individuals in England were doing at this very minute.

11

You must not imagine that I want to depict all of us people on board ship as being highly superior to all the people on shore, chock-full of patriotism, and taking an intelligent interest in the high affairs of state in contrast to the narrow-minded landmen wrapped up in their own little selfish thoughts and schemes.

A good many of us looked at the whole business from their own particular and personal view-point; perhaps we all did so; though I will say this for naval officers in general, at least for all those in my own ship who I suppose may be taken as fairly typical of the whole lot, that not one of them dreamt

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for a moment of putting his own interests—oh, well, it's hard to express what I mean without talking like a dictionary; but anyhow, though some grouched and grumbled they all intended to play the game, and did play it.

There was, for example, Trythall, our senior watchkeeper. He was one of those who the master-at-arms fetched back to the ship by motor-car. Trythall had a pretty little house standing back from the Dorchester Road, out beyond Upwey. He also had a very charming little wife, and a perfect ripper of a little four-year-old girl who was the intimate friend of everybody in our wardroom, and always insisted on being addressed as Miss Trythall. Nor were her friendships entirely confined to the officers; some of her dearest acquaintances were formed with members of the lower deck. On the occasion of her fourth birthday she announced her intention of having a tea-party in the wardroom.

“I'm going to ask you, Captain Lowndes.”

“Thank you very much, Miss Trythall, I shall be both honoured and delighted.”

“And you too, Mr. Meredyth.”

Mr. Meredyth, by the way, was the Muddled Oaf, and a special pal of Miss Trythall. He grunted his acceptance.

“Yes, and Chief Stoker Button, and Ordinary Seaman Giblets. Just you four—and Daddy and Mummy, of course; nobody else.”

Some diplomatic persuasion was called for before the personnel of the tea-party could be re-arranged.

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Trythall arrived on board that eventful night in a particularly grumpy frame of mind.

"What dashed tomfoolery is all this?" he enquired. "Dragging a fellow away from his comfortable fireside at this time of night! Silly nonsense, I call it!"

A good many people were to be dragged away from their comfortable firesides before all this was over; but we did not realise that, yet.

"Why couldn't they wait till the morning, and do the thing at a gentlemanly hour, if they want to do it at all?" he went on grumbling. "Myra had the dickens of a headache this evening, and this will only upset her more still. And Miss Trythall's none too well."

"You're all alike, you married men," cut in the Oaf, with a cheerful grin on his good-humoured face. "The curse of the Service, that's what you are! You shouldn't go and get married, then you wouldn't come off to your ship like a bear with a sore head."

"If it wasn't for us married men the Service would go to the dogs pretty quick! We are the steady, sober, respectable members—not like you selfish blokes who do nothing for your country and spend all your substance in riotous living! But have your little say—I don't mind, bless you! You'll be getting married yourself one of these days, and then you will alter your tune!"

"What, me?" The Oaf's jaw dropped in horrified disgust. "Not if I know it. I know a trick worth two of that!"

Trythall seemed to consider it not worth while making any further retort, and he relapsed into moodiness; and continued in this state for a whole week. In fact, for the first couple of days he was perfectly impossible and unapproachable, and shut himself up in his cabin at all times when he was not on duty. He owned up, some considerable time afterwards, that he spent these secluded hours in knitting a singlet for Miss Trythall—I ought to mention that he was uncommonly clever at knitting: almost as clever as when playing wing three-quarter in our unbeaten squadron team—and that during all that week he really didn't care whether the whole perishing world went to war or did the other thing.

But no one who saw him at his work in those first few days would have guessed that that mood was on him.

12

I do not altogether wonder at Trythall taking the domestic view of the time's great events while the extent of their greatness was not yet thoroughly known, because I knew something of what he was leaving behind.

Only a few weeks before the war broke out I had spent the afternoon of a lovely June Sunday in the garden of that pretty house off the Dorchester road.

Marjorie Daw and her mother were there too, and the Muddled Oaf, and our little Padre—who

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had to go back on board to conduct Evening Service ; but he refused to budge till the last possible moment from the smooth green turf where he squatted, stodging currant buns and tea, asserting that he was enjoying himself a good deal more here than singing hymns in a stuffy flat, and anyway, the men could wait for ten minutes ! The little heathen !

We sat in the shade of a great spreading beech tree, and were too lazy to do anything more energetic than watch the gambols of the white butterflies that flitted over a bank of blue delphiniums—such a blue ! Quite near to us a thrush ran about amongst the stems of a clump of blazing rhododendrons, sometimes disappearing, then coming into view again, keeping close to the ground, more like a rat than a bird, emboldened by our quietness and silent himself ; his singing-time would not come till later in the evening.

Marjorie Daw chucked him a fragment of cake, which only had the effect of startling him, and off he went with a whirr of wings.

Not having much success with the thrush, Marjorie aimed another fragment for the Oaf to catch in his mouth. He lay sprawled flat on his back in the sunshine, scorning the cool shade, with his hands clasped behind his head.

“ Oh, I say, Miss Daw, that isn’t fair ! ”—as the first shot caught him full in the eye. “ You ought to have said ‘ fore,’ or something. Now have another shy, and I bet you I’ll catch two pieces

out of three." He raised himself on one elbow, and poised with his mouth wide open. It was a very big mouth, and had a splendid outfit of strong, white teeth. "Now then, stand by—fire!" The laughing girl threw carefully, and the Oaf, moving his head with the agility of a fox-terrier, caught first one piece, then a second and a third, and still demanded more; but Marjorie Daw said that he was a lazy fellow, and he couldn't expect her to spend the whole afternoon feeding him—just as if she hadn't suggested the game herself!

Lounging about on the grass sounds very pleasant and nice, and, indeed, it is all right for men-folk, but for ladies it is not so easy to find a position which combines comfort with the degree of elegance they consider essential; besides, there are dresses to be thought of. Even sitting with your back against the broad trunk of a beech tree, though certainly comfortable and not ungraceful, is rather apt to make your dress all bitty. Mrs. Trythall discovered this, and called her husband to her aid.

"Come here, Billy, and make a back for me. And bring the cake with you. I want you to sit back to back with me, then I shall be supporting you, so it's really very kind of me."

Trythall obediently came, shuffling across the grass in a succession of jerks and bumps that must have cost him a good deal more energy than if he had got up and walked, but that was too much to expect of him.

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"You are a nuisance, Kid," he sighed, settling himself into the required position.

"Don't lean back so hard, you're doubling me right up!" Myra told him.

"Oh, sorry! But I thought you said you were going to support me," grinned Trythall, as he stiffened his back and sat bolt upright.

"That's very nice; now stay just like that."

I really believe that half the reason for this manœuvre was that she might stretch out the hand on the side hidden from the rest of us and link her fingers with Billy's. These two had been married for over five years, but had consistently refused to acknowledge any end to their honeymoon.

Presently—"Billy, your back's awful hot! I never felt such a hot back as yours, it's simply boiling! Go and get me a chair."

The Oaf got up to forestall him, but was arrested by a cry from Marjorie Daw.

"Oh, Mr. Meredyth, quickly, help me! Oh!"

"What's up?" said the Oaf, coming over to her in a couple of long strides.

"A spider! On my dress! Take it off quickly. Oh, hurry, do!" There was a genuine look of distress on the face of the poor girl. But I regret to say that the Oaf laughed unsympathetically, as he stretched down a huge paw and scooped the offending spider into his palm.

"Oh, kill it, *kill* it, do; the horrid thing!" insisted Marjorie.

"Kill it? Not at all! Why should I?" said

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the Oaf, opening his hand and looking with a friendly interest at the spider, which thereupon uncurled itself and scrambled round to the back of his wrist, where it found some difficulty in picking its way amongst a forest of thick brown hair. From which awkward situation the Oaf rescued it with a gentle finger and thumb, and crossing the little lawn deposited it with great care in the middle of a flower bed. I could not help observing that he showed equal tenderness for the feelings of both the girl and the spider, and I thought that this was a very good promise of happiness to any girl with whom he might chance to fall in love.

You will observe that I have made no attempt to give a detailed description of our happy afternoon or to reproduce the conversation ; as a matter of fact, I do not suppose that any of us spoke a dozen words of what might be called really intelligent conversation, of the sort that people talk in books. Such as there was, indeed, was entirely wasted on one member of the party ; namely, Mrs. Daw, who, overcome by the drowsiness of the warm, balmy air, nodded off to sleep all the afternoon till tea-time, only recovering herself with a little start every now and again to say, " I'm not asleep, my dears ; I've heard every word you've been saying." Which was obviously untrue, but no one could have had the heart to dispel her pleasant delusion.

I only want to try and convey to you some impression of a happy, slumbrous Sunday afternoon in June, in a garden of soft green shades and bright-

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hued flowers, all nice and smelly; the feel of the luscious grass; the pleasant rattle of tea-cups; the good taste of the sort of things you have at tea, when you eat them in the open air; and, above all, the presence of thoroughly pleasant people who know each other well enough not to bother about being polite or to talk when they do not feel like talking.

The only thing lacking was the company of a little child, and this we had to do without because Miss Trythall had invited herself out to tea with a neighbouring bachelor vicar whom she had announced her intention of marrying.

Such afternoons and such pleasant gatherings, dreamily gay, drifting along the stream of the sunlit hours, with no careful design and yet so thoroughly good, were perhaps as typical as anything that could be found of the England that was, the England of the days before the war.

One looked back upon them, afterwards, with longing regret; and wondered if they could ever be again.

13

The cruise of the Fleet to Scapa was uneventful except for one small incident which *might* have proved a very big one.

During the dim hours, when the Fleet had not long turned the corner to go northwards, a flotilla of destroyers was sighted away on the eastern horizon,

too far distant for them to be made out distinctly or for the challenge to be given.

The uncertainty whether they might or might not be German destroyers naturally gave rise to a good deal of anxiety. For all that anyone could tell the next few minutes might bring forth a great and fateful action, a night attack on the Fleet by a determined dash of destroyers. Perhaps a swarm of torpedoes had already left their tubes and were even now speeding along their unseen path beneath the water towards the great ships.

True, England and Germany were still at peace and on terms of at least nominal friendship ; but, seeing that Germany had within the past few days given ocular demonstration that she realised the military advantage to herself of striking first and declaring war afterwards, might she not be inclined to apply the same formula to England ?

Undoubtedly, it would be a tremendous advantage to Germany to destroy the British Fleet, or even to cripple it seriously, at this early stage of the game ; and if the opportunity favoured the intention, no other consideration would be likely to hinder Germany from making the attempt.

These very obvious considerations must have occurred to the mind of the officer of the watch on the bridge of every single battleship as he peered out to the eastward and strained his eyes to make out just what those destroyers might be doing.

You can picture him, I daresay, in that lonely position, and enter into his thoughts and feelings.

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A watch-keeping officer may be a youngster of only a few months' seniority as lieutenant, but a terrible responsibility rests on him. He may be called upon at any minute to make a decision of tremendous import, to make it quickly—and alone.

Always there rests with him the safety of the ship and of every soul on board ; and sometimes, as in this present case, a good deal more than the safety of his own ship alone—the very existence of the whole Fleet, the fate of the Empire.

What a relief it must have been when the distant line of destroyers passed out of sight still keeping on their same course and gave no sign of having any intention of making an attack ! The mental tension of those few minutes was quickly relaxed ; it was a preliminary screwing up of nerves which were soon to submit to many such strains and even greater ones.

Apparently, the destroyers must have been one of our own flotillas proceeding on its way to take up its appointed station in accordance with orders. Anyhow, we saw no more of it.

And the first news to many of us that any such incident had taken place during the night was when Madden, our junior watchkeeper, cheerfully announced to us at breakfast : “ Rotten bad luck last night, when I was on watch ; saw a lot of destroyers, and thought at first they were Germans coming to have a biff at us. Wouldn't it have been a jolly rag if they had ? ”

Madden was more commonly known to us as Wet U'n, both because a surname like that simply asked for it, and because of his own personal characteristics and behaviour. But there was another and deeper side to his character in that he was a youth of dark Machiavellian schemes and theories, a cold, calculating extremist who delighted in formulating crafty plans in which neither sentiment nor morality had the slightest share.

I think it must have been this night vision of a threatened attack by German destroyers that first implanted in his mind the seed of a theory which he some time afterwards developed for our edification.

"What we ought to have done," he informed us, "is just this; we should have lain low and said nothing, and let Germany think we intended to remain neutral. Then she would have brought her Fleet out and made straight for the Channel to attack the French Fleet or bombard their ports. We should have let the German ships do this; and when they had come well out and away from their own base, then we ought to have nipped in behind them and cut them off. We could have mopped up the whole boiling lot of them; not a single German ship would ever have got home again. If you like, we could have made a formal declaration of war by wireless just about half an hour before the Fleets got into touch; personally, I should be against any twaddle of that sort; still, if you are keen on

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observing the conventions—but either way, we should have put the German Fleet down under, that's the main thing. It would have saved a lot of trouble after ; all this confounded watching and waiting up here, for instance ! ”

This cold-blooded theory of Madden's certainly opens up long avenues of thought. It would have sounded perfectly natural from the lips of a Prussian, and in a more high-sounding form might have been quoted from any one of a dozen or so books by German military writers and philosophers of the *Might-is-Right* school. To the old-fashioned and conventional mind of the average Englishman, accustomed to regard military advantage as of far less importance than honourable and recognised methods of warfare, it seems undeserving of any serious attention other than an immediate condemnation.

Is one, however, necessarily an *Advocatus Diaboli* in pointing out that there is something to be said on the other side ?

As a matter of morality, it is not arguable whether one may ever do evil that good may come. This may be regarded as a closed question.

Yet history is full of dark deeds which led to the amelioration of society ; so much so that it is hard to think of many great steps of progress in human affairs that did not originate in violence and wrong.

That was a deed of black shame and dishonour, when the young men of early Rome took to themselves wives by force, cheating the Sabine men and

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tearing away their shrieking wives and daughters, themselves laughing deep down in their hairy chests at the howling imprecations of the men and the squeals of the women; and yet this cruel and despicable trick led to the founding of the commonwealth of world-civilising Rome.

And you can easily trace a long succession of such deeds, from that early day to the time when equal cruelty and trickery on the part of Clive and Warren Hastings tamed the Indian jungle of tigers and hinds into a paradise of apocalyptic peace.

Of course, it is open to the moralist to argue that the same progress would have been achieved and even reached the sooner and the more perfectly by honourable methods; in which the moralist is very likely right. However, I do not want now to wander into the dim and difficult paths of Philosophical History. And if I have digressed for a few steps it is time now to retrace my way and get back to the high road.

Pausing, however, for just one more moment at the junction of the paths, I would like to be quite fair to young Madden and say that his scheme for destroying the German Fleet would not be considered a mean trick by all people. To strike first and declare war afterwards is quite contrary to all the ancient rules of warfare, certainly; but in modern times those rules are apt to be disregarded as foolishly sentimental; the warfare of to-day being chiefly conducted on the principle:

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*"Blest is the man who hath his quarrel just,
But doubly blest is he who gets his blow in just."*

And I suppose there can be no question that if we had succeeded in destroying the entire German Fleet in the first week of hostilities this would have led to a quick decision, and would have largely prevented the untold suffering that spread over all nations in the after years.

However, I am glad we didn't do it—that way.

15

The men who took those ships northward on that historical cruise belonged to a system of things already swept by the tide of war into the backwater of the obsolete and the half-forgotten.

We used to talk about "Old Navy" admiringly or contemptuously according to our own personal views and experience, in the old days of peace; meaning the Old Navy of masts-and-yards, or the Navy as it was when the Channel Fleet used to lord it on the seas at a cruising speed of five knots.

But, in truth, the officers and men who comprised the ships' companies on that great Odyssey into the mists of the North, themselves formed an Old Navy, looked at in the light of after developments.

Not yet had there swarmed into the Fleet that invading host—and very welcome invaders they were—of R.N.R. and R.N.V.R. men who afterwards joined up, corresponding to the Territorials,

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the Kitchener's men and the Conscripts who transformed the Old Regular Army into an altogether new thing. We, too, had all these various brands of new blood in course of time ; but, at first, the officers and crews who manned the ships were the counterpart of the Army of Mons, men of the " pukka Navy," who took on this job as something that was all in the day's work and nothing more than what they had signed on for.

Their ages ranged from sixty to sixteen ; some had spent the best part of a lifetime in the Service, and some had joined only a few days ago. But one and all were in some subtle and indescribable manner *different* from those who came after. It was purely a spiritual difference. They were imbued with the traditions of the Service, and whether this resulted from the first chilly dip or from a long-continued soaking, it amounted to the same thing in all hands. They had neither the enthusiasm of the volunteer adventurer nor the sulkiness of the unwilling pressed man ; in fact, they were entirely free from all unnecessary sentimentalism, and looked on the Navy as a trade which they had taken up with their eyes open. Something more than a trade, perhaps ; a career of honour in which they might serve King and Country. But still, a life's work.

For this reason they treated each other differently from the newcomers. I do not mean that they resented the outsiders coming to invade their ancient privileges, because this is the very opposite to what

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they did. On the contrary, those of the Old Regular Navy were more exacting towards one another, and have continued to be so to this day, not making the allowances even for the youngest entry who "joins up properly" as are made for even an experienced outsider who comes in temporarily, let him remain for months or even years.

Yes, I certainly think that these heroes of the Great Trek deserve a special and distinct remembrance in the minds of those who shall look back when the war is all over and endeavour to make a mental reconstruction of its beginnings. And when I say "these heroes" I only mean these actors in the drama; for nothing nauseates a naval man so much as the attempt to represent him as a hero or to theatricalise him and his profession. We have had to endure in silence a sickening amount of this sort of thing since the war began, and, I regret to say, to see it encouraged by the posings and posturings of just a *very* few of those who came to us from outside, the harmful unteachable few who Do Not Understand.

But the men who first went North were not heroic. Of course there were vast differences even amongst themselves. The younger ones numbered some who were brimming with zeal and enthusiasm, already marked out in the hey-day of happy youth for a career of success and honour; and some had even now shown themselves failures, good-for-nothings, King's Bad Bargains. Their seniors corresponded to them; there were officers and men

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soured and embittered by long service, jealous of those who had gone over their heads, sullen with many grievances not always imaginary, and counting the days and the years to the time when they could turn their backs on the Navy for good. Others had got on well, by their own merits or by luck, and spoke only with pride and affection of "the Old Firm" which had looked after them so kindly and so long.

But these, at either extreme, were the exceptions; the vast majority were just ordinary individuals, going each in his own way quietly and sticking to his duty with a greater or less degree of interest.

Exactly the same sort of people, I imagine, as went to sea with Nelson.

Before many months were over, thousands of them were to find their last resting-place beneath the grey waves of the North Sea. They gave their lives in the same manner as they had spent them, quietly and gladly, without making a song about it. Others would follow, they knew, to carry on the business and the traditions of the Old Firm.

16

The great harbour of Scapa Flow for which the ships were making was probably unknown to at least ninety per cent. of the men on board. It had not been altogether unused by naval ships. For many years past the Channel Fleet had visited

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it occasionally. I myself had spent three weeks there in the parent ship of a destroyer flotilla some few years before, during the Manœuvres. But the most of us were now visiting the place for the first time. We all got to know it quite well, afterwards ! At that time, however, there were probably far more German than Englishmen who had a good knowledge of this anchorage in the Orkneys. For a large number of Germans used to come across every year and spend a summer holiday in the place, running big pleasure-yachts specially fitted for this traffic. They came, ostensibly, as tourists, but we have learnt since then that a German tourist usually has some ulterior purpose behind that of mere pleasure-making, and if he is not a paid professional spy he is, generally speaking, an amateur who dabbles in the dirty work for the pure love of the thing. I do not suppose there is much to be known about the Orkneys and their inhabitants which is not deposited in the governmental archives of Germany, carefully compiled by those summer tourists. However, it doesn't seem to have done them very much good !

For a knowledge of the waters and coasts of the place Germany depended on a still more impudent method. German cruisers had taken advantage in peace time to visit this harbour, and doubtless did not spend the time in idleness.

Now, there is no harm in naval ships visiting the harbours of another country ; it is a thing frequently done, by ourselves more than by any other nation.

But it is usual to ask permission first, and to indicate the date and length of the visit, what ships are coming, and how many of them. In fact, there is a very strict etiquette about this foreign visiting, and the breach of it would rightly be considered almost an international insult.

Germany, however, did not think it worth while to observe this formality when she sent her men-o'-war to the British port of Scapa Flow.

17

I do not propose to burden my readers with a description of the place. But having before mentioned the fact of its being extraordinarily well adapted for use as a war harbour, I may as well explain why this is so, without divulging any confidential secrets—though, as I have said, there is little danger of doing that, as the Germans knew all about the place long ago.

Before I first set eyes on the Orkneys I used to imagine this northern archipelago as a romantic and beautiful island group, full of the sort of scenery that poets would rave about.

The reality is very different. True, there are times, in the height of summer, when the scene is one of real beauty, but that is chiefly owing to the wonderful light and the sea. The Island of Hoy, too, the second largest and the westernmost of the group, is mountainous and has some boldly picturesque cliffs. But with this one exception the

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islands are all more or less low-lying, and practically treeless. There is little to attract the eye in the boggy moorland which occupies the greater part of their extent, and the cultivated land in the valleys and near the shore is of such poor character that it cannot boast the exuberant beauty owned by similar districts in the more fertile south.

I daresay the Orcadians may resent this description, as they probably think there is no place in the world to compare with Orkney; and I quite admit that the more one gets to know the place the more pleasant it seems to look upon. But I am speaking of the view of the new-comer, to whom it certainly appears a bleak and barren spot.

However, beauty is not everything. From the naval point of view a very different description of the place can be given.

The great natural protection of the harbour is the Pentland Firth, which separates the Orkneys from the mainland. Here a fierce tide runs, with innumerable races, rips and currents, constantly changing and reappearing in unexpected localities, making navigation difficult and dangerous for small craft even in calm weather.

During a storm—and storms are frequent enough in these latitudes—and for days afterwards, the task of navigating the Firth is almost an impossibility, except for such hardy seamen as spend their lives up here.

The Firth is not very wide; at its narrowest part, which happens to be the eastern entrance,

it is not more than ten miles across. Consequently it is not over hard to patrol. So, what with the constant watch of patrol vessels and the natural difficulties of navigation, a German destroyer or submarine that should desire to find its way into the harbour would have but a slender chance. And as for a submarine attempting the passage of the Firth below the surface, woe betide the unfortunate crew ! They would never see the light of day again. For, bad as the surface currents are, the deeper currents are infinitely worse, being unknown and unknowable ; they are lurking far down below, like the sea-demons of the ancient beliefs, ready to seize hold of any craft that dares to invade their gloomy deeps, and drag her aside out of her course, flinging her against the wicked rocks and jagged cliffs which, unseen and uncharted, line the sides and cover the sea-floor of the cruel Pentland Firth.

Another great natural advantage of the place is the mild climate. Although so far north, the islands are not nearly so cold as might be expected ; the reason being that they are washed by the beneficent Gulf Stream, which renders the air temperature but little varying all the year round. Indeed, in winter, many places on the east coast of England are far colder than Scapa, where the climate at this season is not greatly different from that of Devonshire.

These climatic conditions render it possible for the men of the Fleet to live with at least far less discomfort than might have to be endured else-

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where; having myself endured them for three successive winters I think I am entitled to my opinion, and I do not think that many will be found to disagree with me.

There is no doubt also that it is a very healthy place. Exact statistics have been compiled, I suppose, by the medical branch, but without being able to quote these I can safely assert that the men of the Grand Fleet have never been so free from sickness as during this war; though, of course, there are other contributory causes. Prominent amongst these contributory causes may be reckoned another of the natural advantages of Scapa, namely, that it lies cut off from the mainland and remote from the dangers and diseases of great cities.

Remote also from their distractions; and this, though you may be inclined to think it counts against a place, proved in reality a saving grace. Because when we knew that it was quite impossible to "see life" we contented ourselves and realised that it was no good crying for the moon; but when we visited harbours where big towns were within reach the perversity of human nature made us discontented and uneasy; having tasted a little we wanted more, and were sometimes bad tempered because we could not get it.

When the sands of July had nearly run out there occurred an event of great importance in the fasten-

ing of the Safety Curtain. Sir John Jellicoe came up North to take over the command of the Grand Fleet. He travelled *incognito* from King's Cross to Wick, where the light cruiser *Boadicea* was waiting to take him and his staff across the Pentland Firth.

From this very first moment the weather seemed to range itself against him, and gave him a foretaste of the same scurvy trick it was afterwards to play him at Jutland. As the train rolled down the slope of the last few miles towards Wick, a grey fog began to come up from the sea and drift heavily shorewards in a thick white bank.

The Admiral went on board the *Boadicea*, but to leave the harbour was almost out of the question, and it was decided to remain until the fog should show signs of lifting.

All that night the ship's bell clanged gloomily every few minutes, and even those who were down below in their cabins could tell by the muffled sound of the ringing that the fog bank was as thick as ever.

In the early morning the weather lifted a little and the sun shone out. At once the order to weigh was given, and the little cruiser hastened to start on the short cruise across the narrow waters that separated her from her objective.

But the promise of improvement in the weather was only elusive; the gleam of sunshine proved to be but temporary; and the *Boadicea* had not got far on her way before the fog came down as thick

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as before, and she was forced to put back again towards Wick.

After a while she turned about once more, and carefully felt her way through the fog, which, fortunately, became much less dense on nearing the Orkneys.

Off the entrance to the Flow the mist disappeared, and in its place was a steady dripping rain falling through a heavy atmosphere, and making patterns of intersecting rings on an oily smooth sea.

What mattered the weather? The Man had arrived who was to shape the destinies of the Grand Fleet and instil into it something of his own unequalled personality.

We were still not at war, and did not even know whether we should ever go to war. Opinions in the wardroom were pretty evenly divided as to our present chances.

Phlegmatic people whose memories carried a long way back shook their heads, and recalled many an occasion when England had been brought so near the verge of hostilities that it had seemed impossible to escape; a quarrel with France appeared inevitable at the time of the Fashoda incident; the Dogger Bank affair was within an ace of bringing on war with Russia; we nearly went to war with America over Venezuela, with Germany over Agadir, with Turkey over a frontier question at Akaba. But on all these occasions, and others besides, the threatened outbreak never took place; so, as likely

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as not, the present affair might fizzle out in just the same manner.

Those who were of this opinion were candidly disgusted at the prospect, and said so.

But the greater number of us inclined to the opinion that England was certain to "come in."

And because such a divergence of prophecy offered a capital opportunity of putting a little life into the dullness of the waiting period, the more enthusiastic theorists on either side became embued with a sporting desire to back their opinions.

The bets, taken and offered, generally took the form of half-gins.

"I hope we shan't chip in," Madden was heard to observe; "if we do, I lose sixteen half-glasses of What Killed Auntie."

And when it was pointed out to him that even weightier issues than this hung upon the balance of the international situation, his only reply was: "Yes, I know; if we *don't* go to war I stand to make thirty-two spots, *with* Angostura and brandied cherries in 'em!"

What he spoke openly in jest, not a few miserable soulless individuals were unfortunately saying to themselves in sober earnest, on a larger scale, in England.

Each night we sat up eagerly waiting for the Poldhu wireless press message to come through; it usually came just about midnight, and the ante-room, usually deserted at this hour, was filled with officers who cared nothing for the fact that they

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would have to turn out again at four o'clock to keep the morning watch, and with others of mature age and sedate habits who would customarily have been snugly tucked up in beddy-bye and fast asleep an hour ago. Excited expectation gave place each night to disappointment at the paucity of news, events marching far too slowly for our unsated curiosity.

We were, of course, in total ignorance of the fact that events were really marching all this time with tremendous swiftness, every hour witnessing a gigantic advance, or, to speak more correctly, an enormous backward slip, as our diplomatists strove and strove in vain; first, to prevent the outbreak of the flames, and, afterward, when this was recognised a superhuman task, to limit the area of devastation within as narrow bounds as possible; this, too, soon proved too much for their herculean endeavours.

Picket-boats were constantly steaming across the harbour from every ship, bearing their respective captains to the flagships of their squadrons, and the admirals of squadrons to the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief to attend meetings and receive orders. These deliberations were, naturally, kept secret from us of the commonalty, except so far as they might concern the workings of any particular department, and, even then, they were strictly confidential. The result, of course, was to increase our curiosity and set all sorts of rumours afloat.

From the first day of our arrival our letters were

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censored, and all mention of our whereabouts was strictly forbidden. Some of us felt this rather severely, especially those who were married, since for some abstruse reason a parting seems all the harder to bear when you cannot let your wife know where you are. Of course this is quite unreasonable, and the more spartan husbands took the cold sensible view of the situation, and said : " What possible good can it do my missus to know where I am ? I daresay she wants to know, but she can just carry on wanting, and it won't hurt her ! "

The very young married officers thought this extremely callous.

20

It is very far from my intention to write a Diary of the Great War, with all the dates and times inserted correctly. The great objection to chronological records of that kind is that lots of people write them and nobody ever reads them.

One date, however, cannot be passed over without special mention, and that is the one which put an end to all our guesses and arguments, telling us that the nation had made its decision, and had chosen the hard path of honour. Like many other most eventful days it passed off most uneventfully. August the fourth was not greatly different from August the third or August the fifth, so far as we were concerned.

It was not till eleven o'clock at night that we

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got the news. At that hour a wireless message was passed to us from the flagship, and a signalman came into the ante-room with the chit in his hand.

Someone took it from him and read the message aloud.

It ran thus: "*Commence hostilities against Germany.*"

The most weighty four words that had ever sounded in the nation's ears! Pregnant with monstrous issues, threatening black sorrow to a million peaceful homes, inviting the foul harpies of War, Pestilence, and Famine to hover with gloomy wings over the earth instead of speeding the swift shadow of their flight, calling to happy Youth to lay aside its glory in corruption, those four words nevertheless contained within their brief compass the promise that evil should not triumph over good, and that after all the hideous trials to come, the earth should yet again be a fair place to live in.

This, I suppose, is a fair summary of what we all felt. But we did not express our feelings in anything at all resembling these terms. There was a great sense of exhilaration, because we knew quite well that we should win, and because we were glad that we were not to be shamed by an ignominious neutrality. Furthermore, we were not sorry to have a smack at Germany, which had been getting a great deal too uppish, and needed to be put in her proper place.

That night we sat up late, discussing a hundred matters all in connection with the coming war,

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making a good many conjectures that looked foolish enough in the light of after events, and laying down the law after our usual manner as to what ought or ought not to be done for the successful conduct of the war.

Our gunnery lieutenant brushed aside all the wider questions of policy and strategy, and looked at the whole affair purely from his own personal and professional standpoint. Gunnery lieutenants, of course, are all stark staring mad, and the only difference between them is that some are madder than others.

Our own representative of this highly scientific and specialised branch rubbed his hands and chortled in his joy.

"Now we shall really be able to see what the Krupp guns are good for," was his delighted comment; "they've talked a lot of hot air about them and turned up their noses at our wire-wound guns; but they'll sing a different song before this lot's over."

Now, ours was the best gunnery ship in a squadron noted for its gunnery, and we were all secretly proud of the fact, but we couldn't possibly allow "Guns" to take the bit in his teeth in this fashion, so we suppressed him to the best of our ability, and he went off in a huff to work out a new spotting scheme in the armament office.

I suppose that in the wardroom of the German Navy at this moment the officers were solemnly standing round stiffly and strictly at attention and

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clicking their heels together, while they vowed ridiculous pledges of hatred to England, and all that sort of thing. Perhaps, their captains came in and made burning little speeches all about the honour of the Fatherland, with side references to the shining sword and the glittering armour and the mailed fist ; and then they all solemnly Hoch'd their Kaiser, and saluted. I expect so, anyhow.

We didn't take it like that, as you see. It was not our way. *Our* captain came into the mess, but he did not make a speech ; he said that, so far as he could figure it out, those silly asses of Germans had been asking for trouble for a long time, and now they had got it ; and he hoped the wine steward wasn't turned in because he wanted a drink, and it wouldn't be a bad idea if we all had one with him. Which we did. Our captain was distinctly one of ourselves, and we one and all loved him, and respected him at the same time. Like Nelson with his captains, we were, on a smaller scale, "a band of brothers." There were a good many other captains of the same type in the Fleet ; and this spirit of comradeship tempered with allegiance was one of the many factors that made for confidence in whatever naval occasions might arise.

Madden, naturally, took the line directed by his cold-blooded brain.

"It's the best thing that could have happened for me," he remarked. "Here am I, three hundred and odd places down on the lieutenants' list, and never a dog's chance of ever getting promoted until

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this came along. Now, with any luck, some of the birds above me will be knocked off their perch, and I shall hop into their places."

"Callous little brute!" we observed. "How can you be such a bloodthirsty ruffian? Besides, it may as well be you that gets knocked out, as much as anybody else."

"In that case," he replied, "I shan't have to bother about it. Of course, I don't want any fellow to lose the number of his mess; but, all the same, a good many will, and I should be a fool not to be glad about being shoved up on the list. So would anybody!"

There was no arguing with him. We sat talking a while longer, and then drifted away to our cabins.

At the back of our minds, no doubt, all of us had been thinking about those at home whom we had left so suddenly and unexpectedly a few days ago. Some anxiety was mingled with much tenderness in these unspoken thoughts; anxiety for the feelings, the feelings and the loneliness of those so dear ones, but not anxiety for their security. That, at any rate, we knew was assured; the Fleet had taken up its appointed station—The Safety Curtain had clashed down into its place.

II. The Curtain in Place .

II. The Curtain in Place

1

TAKING a mental glance at ourselves as we were in those very early days, four years ago, we see now what very curious and illogical creatures we were. Our ideas on the subject of naval warfare were elementary in the extreme. To explain what these ideas were I cannot do better than quote a certain temporary surgeon who joined us not long ago; after a few days in the ship he went about with the proverbial "face like a sea-boot," and seemed entirely ill-pleased with life in the British Navy.

"What's biting you, Little Sunshine?" we asked in our kindly way.

"Fed up with the Navy," he replied; "I wouldn't have joined it if I had known it was going to be like this. I wish now that I had volunteered for the Army instead!"

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“Well, I imagined there would have been a Fleet action about once a week, with minor scrapping in between whiles. I expected to be chasing German ships all day long, and bagging two or three of ’em every time we went out. I thought I should have to live with my ears continually stuffed with cotton-wool on account of the perpetual gunfire—but I’m blest if I ever expected this sort of thing!”

We were able by this time to smile at him in a superior fashion, having ourselves outgrown these ideas: but, really, he only expressed what we all thought at the beginning of the war. We expected sea-fights of the type described in the books of Marryat and Henty, dashing heroic actions, thrilling chases, and dramatic large-scale battles; and we looked to witness these both early and often.

But they did not happen. In fact nothing happened, or very little. We were all at the pitch of high expectancy, but excepting for the official announcement that we were in a state of war we could not observe any very great difference from being at peace.

One evening, during those very early days, when the Fleet was at anchor, we heard the sound of guns firing. Everyone rushed on deck at once, eager to find out what was doing. We saw two of our cruisers getting under way and proceeding towards the harbour’s entrance. This increased our excitement, and immediately created a rumour that the

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Germans were making a bold attack and trying to force their way in. The only undetermined point was whether the attack was a mere affair of destroyers or whether the whole of the High Seas Fleet were assembled outside and waiting for us to come out.

We looked anxiously towards the Flagship, hoping to see the signal that should order us to weigh anchor and steam out to settle the affair.

But when nothing further happened, and no signal fluttered out at the Flagship's yardarm, we reluctantly came to the conclusion that there was to be no fighting that evening; and so we all went below again. Not till a day or two after did we piece together the facts; the two cruisers had simply put to sea on ordinary patrol duties; and the gunfire which we had heard was from some light guns that had been hastily mounted at the entrance of the harbour as a temporary defence and were then being tested.

It was the first of many disappointments.

2

And, indeed, thinking it over, it seems to me extraordinary that the German Battle Fleet should not have decided to challenge us in those first days of the war.

Most of us confidently expected a Fleet action within the first fortnight, and I suppose the majority of people on shore expected the same. Perhaps

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those of us who were better informed may have guessed that matters would turn out just as they did ; but, for the life of me, I cannot, to this day, make out why the German High Seas Fleet did not risk all and come out to attack us as soon as war was declared.

True, our Fleet was much the stronger ; but the disproportion was smaller then than it became afterwards, very much smaller indeed, and the Germans must have been well aware that we should soon be increasing our naval forces at a far greater ratio than they could hope to do.

Had they put the matter to the test then, who knows what the event might have been ? In the pride of our unchallenged record we may be inclined to dismiss the question lightly, and say that of course we should have blown the German ships out of the water. Well, we might have done so, and probably should have ; but the infinite chances of war combining unluckily with the fickle favour of the elements might just possibly have led to a very different result. On that "just possibly" it was surely worth while for the Germans to gamble ; for, had the luck been with them, even just sufficiently to allow them to cripple our Fleet seriously without defeating it entirely, the material and moral result would have gone far towards winning the war for them, and possibly winning it in the first two or three months. On the other hand, had they lost their Fleet, they would have been little the worse off, and would almost certainly have received

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some compensation by inflicting a certain amount of damage upon our Fleet.

However, great as the prize of victory would have been for them, to make up their minds to challenge us would have required the spirit of men willing to take the risk of a sporting chance. And the Germans never were sportsmen.

3

Ask any officer of the executive branch what is the thing most deeply engraven on his memory as a relic of those early days, and he will probably answer in two words "Net Defence." You must bear in mind that our Fleet anchorage was at that time entirely undefended except by Nature.

This fact alone ought to convince the Germans, if it were worth while trying to convince them, that we neither began the war nor were indeed prepared for it. In many another respect, also, we had to improvise, but nothing was so important as this, whether you consider it as a proof of our unwillingness for war, or—as the executive officers of the Fleet considered it—in the light of an extremely unpleasing job of work which had to be seen to immediately.

It was a job of amateur work; for the naval officer's ordinary training does not include the art and science of barring waterways against enemy ingress. Still, the thing had to be done somehow, and, as usual, the Navy rose to the occasion.

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A temporary defence was improvised, each squadron being responsible for a section, and each ship for a definite share. And what a business it was ! The upper deck of every ship became a trap for unwary feet, like a course laid out for an obstacle race, as the working parties spread out lengths of wire and laboriously wove them into nets of monstrous mesh and Brobdignagian extent.

Nor was this the end of the trouble by any means. The completion of the work was not an affair of a few days, and when it was but partly done, as well as afterwards, the task of keeping it in repair was even more toilsome than that of making it.

Daily would come the signal which stated that so many E.C. mine-cases (the floats of the nets) had disappeared, that such and such a length of wire had parted, and that the net in one place or another had carried away. The officers who were told off to look after this particular job became quite nerve-racked in a small way concerning this constant signal, expecting it every hour and feeling that it was bound to come even after many hours of deceptive silence—and of course it always came at a time when some other pressing work was in hand.

No wonder the duty was not looked upon as enjoyable ; for naturally it was a bad-weather job—in fine weather there would be no breakages needing repair. And in those early days all such work had to be done by means of picket boats ; for then we had none of those invaluable drifters which afterwards proved such a huge boon, enabling

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harbour-work to be carried on in all weathers. As the months drew on, the seas frequently became too rough even in that land-locked harbour for the little picket boats, staunch as those boats are; and in such high latitudes, it must be remembered, the wintry storms begin much earlier than they do further south. Many times before our first Christmas up there we were cut off from all communication with the shore and with other ships for as long as three days at a time. It was the worst winter of all, not only in respect of the weather itself, but more still on account of our not yet having the inestimable aid of those Friends of the Fleet, the drifters.

So the picket boat detailed for net-defence duty would be called away; generally towing a cutter with a derrick rigged in the stern sheets for the purpose of raising to the surface the weighty gear submerged. The officer in charge and the boat's crew, all in heavy oilskins, clambered down into the boat and shoved off, driving into the heavy waves which covered the plunging boat with lashing curtains of spray.

Out beyond, at the spot for which the boat was making, one could just see a welter of grey, and knew that there the waves were tumbling much more ominously than here at the ship's side.

In such a delectable spot the work had to be done. Often with a heavy rain beating down and an icy wind blowing hard. To find the parted and semi-sunken wires, grapple them to the surface,

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join, and refloat them, was a task that sorely tried the tempers of all concerned, as may well be imagined; and the one and only good point about the job was that it occasionally excused people from the still more unpleasant task of coaling ship when the Fleet came in from one of its frequent—its *very* frequent—cruises.

4

“*Why* they don’t bring out their destroyers and attack us, heaven alone knows!” Madden remarked in high disgust one day when it fell to his lot to go and repair the net defence. “These silly bits of string wouldn’t stop a Thames rowing-boat from getting in! ‘Sides, if that’s what they’re afraid of, why didn’t they come along before we got it started? It might have saved us all this trouble, if they had!”

“You ought to be jolly thankful they haven’t tried it on,” someone said to him; “if their destroyers *had* got in, they might have bent a few of our battleships pretty badly!”

“Well, and s’pose they had? It’s all in the day’s work, isn’t it? And we shouldn’t have had to go fooling about with this beastly net defence any longer! I really do wonder why they haven’t come!”

Many other people shared Madden’s wonder, though not perhaps his motive, and have not yet ceased wondering. If a battleship action was worth risking by the Germans in those early days, a night

attack by their destroyers upon our base was still more easily possible for them and might have won for them results as great or greater. We were very short of destroyers at the beginning of the war; the Germans were strong in them, and were not under the necessity, as we were, of separating their flotillas and diverting some of them to other bases for various purposes.

Amongst ourselves it was always a recognised belief that the German destroyer-officers were a very highly-trained lot of men, full also of dash and daring, and that the destroyer branch was the most expert and specialised of the whole German Navy. Any of our naval officers would have willingly conceded, four years ago, that the German destroyer fellows were at least the equal of our own—and, some added, probably better.

There is a certain pleasurable interest in letting the imagination run riot on—What might have happened. Thank goodness, it did not happen; but the history-books of the future might very easily have had such a tale as this to tell:

“A swarm of German destroyers came swiftly across the North Sea, taking advantage of a day when fog and rain rendered the visibility very low. Every available boat had been raked up to increase the force, and the total number cannot have been much under a couple of hundred. Their commanders had summoned the crews before starting, and had told them that a return to Germany was not to be expected; but in such an enterprise as

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this, where the gain and the glory were so great, the brave adventurers were very willing to give up all hopes of seeing again their beloved Fatherland.

“Such British patrols as were encountered near the coast were either destroyed, not without loss to the German flotillas, or else were driven in; they contrived, however, to give the alarm by wireless, but by this time the enemy was so close to his objective that very little time was left for taking measures of precaution other than those in ordinary use.

“The rocks and currents of the Pentland Firth took toll of the mosquito *Armada* from the very moment it entered that dangerous bottle-neck, some of the boats collided with one another, and others piled themselves up on the iron-bound shores. The British destroyers, dashing out to meet them, accounted for many more but were hopelessly outnumbered, and when these were all sunk or crippled the remnant of the German flotillas was still a mighty force in spite of losses.

“At the narrow entrance of the harbour a further number was accounted for. By this time the darkness had completely set in, and though this proved fatal to some of the destroyers it enabled the greater number of them to reach the defences in safety. Here more of them were lost, and it was a greatly depleted force that finally succeeded in making its way into the harbour. Depleted, indeed, but still very formidable. It is impossible to say how many they were that actually penetrated the inner de-

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fences; some accounts estimate their number at a hundred, while others place it as low as thirty.

“And now the guns of the anchored Fleet began to speak, and searchlight beams swept the dark waters to pick up the on-coming enemy. Destroyer after destroyer became the target of concentrated salvoes and blew up, the explosion of her own magazines mingling with the bursting of the shells that rained thickly against her side.

“But a louder roar was soon heard above the roar of the gunfire. A torpedo, or several torpedoes at once, got home on one of the great battleships, and a sheet of flame towered high into the blackness of the night as the ship blew up with a deafening thunder.

“Falling débris and rolling clouds of oily black smoke made instant confusion in the other battleships, especially those nearest in the line, rendering their fire ineffectual and veiling their searchlights.

“This was the Germans’ chance, a chance they were not slow to seize. Every moment their numbers were being lessened, and wherever a ray of searchlight struck the water it showed up a tangle of floating wreckage mingled with the bodies of men. But those boats that were left still above water made full use of their advantage. A few moments after the blowing up of the first battleship, another one fell a victim to the torpedoes of the persistent attack, and then another, and another; and each time the resultant confusion growing

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greater, the difficulties of the attacking craft were proportionally lessened.

“It is a marvel that any of the British battle-ships escaped ; and equally a marvel that any of the German destroyers should have been able to find their way out of the harbour again and eventually reach home. Only five of them, it is believed, succeeded in doing so ; and the crews of these five were justly loaded with all the honours that Germany could heap upon them as the men who had determined the whole course of the war by their swift and daring stroke.”

Well, as I have said, it is perhaps a very good thing that the German Admiralty was too cautious to venture such an enterprise. Of course, it *might* have turned out quite differently from the above imaginative phantasy ; but then, again, it mightn't.

5

I had almost forgotten to mention the fact that a Fleet action upon the largest possible scale really did take place soon after the commencement of the war—the newspapers said so, and therefore it *must* be true !

It seems almost inexcusable to have forgotten the precise details of such a momentous occurrence, but I regret to say that I have done so, or, at least, I cannot state them with any certainty ; but, to the best of my recollection, the whole of the German Fleet was sent to the bottom, and the price of our

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victory was seventeen of our latest battleships. It is curious how such a thing could have happened without our knowledge; but apparently it must have done so, for our first information on the subject came through a wireless Press message. It made very interesting reading.

Some time afterwards we learnt how the story originated. Two enterprising gentlemen living somewhere in South America, finding themselves hard up for a little ready cash, conceived the bright idea of making some by means of a big newspaper "scoop." There were, however, two great obstacles in the way; first, that they did not happen to know of any important item of news and had no prospect of being able to gain inside information of any such thing; and secondly, that the local newspapers would probably take the greater part of the profits, supposing an exclusive piece of news *should* chance to crop up.

These obstacles did not daunt the two bright lads, who surmounted them by the simple process of inventing their own news and publishing their own newspaper!

Two days' issues of this paper were printed, one of them containing the account of the Great Fleet Action; and on the third day the ingenious proprietors, having achieved their purpose and made their fortune, closed the office of the paper and retired from business.

A large number of continental papers copied the thrill for their readers. For that matter, a large

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number of English readers got a good thrill out of it, and one which lasted for quite a long time. I met, long afterwards, someone who was at that time in an isolated ship on a far distant station, who told me that when he and his shipmates read the account in the wireless Press Message, they quite believed it, or, at any rate, were not inclined to disbelieve it, and were not able to verify or contradict any wireless news until the arrival of the English papers, many weeks later. So this highly-coloured effort of imagination, even if it afterwards proved illusive, provided an exciting topic of conversation for many people for a good many weeks, after all !

6

Mention of Wireless Press Messages reminds me of a great scheme started by our methodical and painstaking Fleet Paymaster with regard to them.

They were received by the wireless operators usually in more or less disjointed and imperfect form, and afterwards written out and copied for the various officers' messes and ship's notice-boards.

The Fleet Paymaster thought it would be a good scheme to collect them all, day by day, and re-write them neatly in a book. We all approved of this heartily, especially as he volunteered to do all the work himself. It would be very handy, we said, to possess such a book for reference ; it would form a complete and concise history of the war, which we should be able to consult if we should

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wish to settle some disputed point or to freshen our memories on any subjects and events we might chance to forget ; and when the war was over the volume would furnish an interesting and valuable memento.

So we encouraged the Fleet Paymaster to begin the task ; not that he needed any encouragement, as he was really very keen about it, being one of those kindly people who are always on the look out to do anything that would give pleasure to the rest of the mess.

About two years afterwards we happened one day to find the book ; we opened its pages with reverent amusement, regarding it as a relic of the past and a monument to our stupendous ignorance of the extent of the war. The book was nearly filled, the written pages all penned neatly and carefully ; but the record did not spread over more than a very few weeks. It stopped suddenly, at a time when the painstaking amanuensis realised that to complete the task he would have to fill not one book but at least a hundred, at the rate the war was progressing and as the flood of Press Messages became ever greater and greater !

At the beginning, these messages came mostly from one single source and were limited to one a day ; but afterwards we received them officially from several different wireless stations, and also picked them up from various stations in foreign countries ; these we were generally able to translate, as amongst the members of our mess there

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were several who could compete with most of the more common European languages.

There was also a daily message compiled by some imaginative gentleman from the headlines of a small local Scotch newspaper.

What with these, and others sent along by the Flagship, it may easily be imagined the work of compiling and re-writing them all would have been one man's job, and in the course of a year or so would have flooded the ship with volumes. So it is no wonder that the Fleet Paymaster gave it up in despair !

One thing was very noticeable about all these Press Messages, namely, that they were invariably far more exciting than the newspapers which followed a day or two later and related the same events at greater length. Indeed, it frequently happened that some really tremendous announcement would appear in the Press Message, making us quite eager to read the full details in the paper when it should arrive ; and when the paper came we had to hunt carefully through its pages, only to find after a long search some small paragraph about the affair tucked away in an obscure corner. But I think that this must have been due to the kindly heart of the compiler of the wireless news, who wished to cheer us up with an exciting tit-bit on days when there was no big news : he probably thought that by the time we received the newspapers something important might really have happened to interest us, and then everything would be all square.

I do not know whether I have succeeded in my attempt to convey the idea of Newness which pervaded all our actions at this period. This Newness coloured everything we did and said and thought ; our enthusiasms were very young, our plans and precautions of the freshest possible kind. When I say that this freshness wore off afterwards I do not mean that we became any less keen ; but, as was bound to happen, our growing familiarity with the situation produced in time the effect of lessening the tension, taking the ingredient of excitement out of the mixture of our days, and causing us to make not quite so much heavy weather over things in general as we had done at the beginning.

One very good instance of this was seen in the character of our earliest letters home. The censorship, instituted from the very start, was one of the few things that differentiated our war-routine from that of peace, and it would not be true to say that we did not feel it a little irksome at the beginning, though we quite realised that it was a necessary evil, since it was highly important that no details should leak out concerning our movements and doings, and some people are so *very* communicative and chatty in their epistles ! Naturally, this censorship extended to the letters of officers as well as men, and all of us in the wardroom were obliged to submit the outpourings of our bosoms to the scrutinising eye of a selected censor.

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Having swallowed this disagreeable necessity, of course we played up to it with infinitely more strictness than was really called for ; inasmuch that some who had previously been in the habit of sending home a daily budget of affectionately-worded memoirs now limited themselves to a post-card without mention of date, ship, or place, and expressed in some such words as :

“ DEAR M,

Am quite well and flourishing.

Hope you are the same.

Everything quite all right here.

Yours,

N.”

What the wives and sweethearts thought about such missives as these I can only imagine ! I suppose they thought that anything was better than nothing, but it must have been a sore trial to some of them to receive these exceedingly dry bones of correspondence in place of the full epistolary meal to which they had been accustomed.

However, there were certain delinquents even among the officers who, from sheer carelessness and inability to accustom themselves to the new state of affairs, proved that the censorship was not a needless formality.

Hotham, the Captain of Marines, was one of these. He had a wife, to whom he used to send, whenever he was at sea, a full and faithful account of his daily doings ; judging by the rueful face of

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the censor when the latter began to deal with his letters, I should think he must have written them more or less in the form of a Diary of the Great War, omitting no detail of any importance whatever.

The censoring officer was much put to it to convey tactfully his brutal verdict that the letter could not be allowed to pass *quite* as it was written. But he felt bound to say, "Look here, old bird—hang it all, you know—but this, what you have said here, why, it's—you really can't—I'm frightfully sorry, but I'm afraid this will have to come out, and this, and this!"

"Why, bless my sweet eyes" —(I take leave to amend Hotham's peculiar phraseology)—"I never thought there was any roseate harm in saying *that*! But cut it out, by all means, old man, if you think so. Go ahead and snip the blithering thing as much as ever you like. Tell me though, just as a rough guide, what *can* I write, and what *mustn't* I write?"

"Well, on general principles, you mustn't say,

*Yes, no, nor nay,
Black, white, nor gray."*

"Eh?"—Hotham's face took on a look of blank wonderment.

"Oh, that's a quotation from a children's game. I mean that you had better think of all the things you would naturally like to write about, and then make up your mind those are the very things you are not allowed to mention."

"But, hang it all, what can I say, then?"

"Oh, well, you will be perfectly safe in writing about the weather, or the state of your liver, or what you had for dinner last night. Any little items of that sort."

"Well, I'm——" Even Hotham's highly-cultivated gift of ornate utterance failed him here.

Trythall also refused to adopt the Spartan simplicity of the postcard and persisted in writing voluminous letters, but they gave no trouble to the censor. He came in person to bring his first letter for inspection, and blushed apologetically; "I always write in that style to my missus," he said, "and I don't see why I should stop doing so now—of course I really don't mind your reading 'em right through if you want to."

The censoring officer glanced at the opening words of the letter. What these words were I cannot say, as I did not see them; but I suspect they were in the style which a good many naval officers adopt when writing to their wives; sailor husbands never cease to be sweethearts, so the proverb says.

The censor closed the letter without reading further. He was an old bachelor and rather cynical as a rule in his remarks about the fair sex. "I might be writing in that style now perhaps, if I had had any luck," was all he said on this occasion. And this remark was the only hint we ever had that a spoilt romance in the past was responsible for both his bachelorhood and his cynicism.

The earliest naval losses of the war, the sinking of the *Speedy*, the *Pathfinder*, and the *Hawke*, brought home to us, more than anything else had yet done, the stern realities of the conflict on which we were only now just entering. Being the first losses of the sort they were proportionately magnified in our minds, and made a far deeper impression than the much greater losses which occurred later.

Yet, I suppose, I ought to have expressed this in quite the opposite way and said that the later losses became minified by our distorted vision when time had dulled our mental outlook and we had become not so much callous as accustomed to such things.

For in truth, as we felt at the time, had such disasters occurred during the period of peace, the whole world would have been appalled by them; the newspapers would have had full-page accounts of the dreadful losses, and telegrams of sympathy would have been sent by the governments of all nations; the Kaiser himself would have been forward in sending one.

But now, we could not help thinking how curious it was that millions of people should actually be feeling *glad* that so many human beings had been drowned; nor did we disguise from ourselves the fact that *we* should have been glad if the victims were Germans. In fact, when the *Hela* was sunk we really were very glad indeed. But in those days

we had the grace to be introspective about it, and to realise the curiousness of our being glad. Afterwards, we did not take the trouble to think so much about it.

A thing which is little realised, I suppose, by the general public is that any naval disaster comes home as a personal loss to every single ship in the Navy, almost to every single officer and man. We are not like the Army, where the fellows of one particular regiment can rarely form a long acquaintance with other Army men outside their own particular regiment. Owing to our constant interchanging, and being, as a rule, certainly not more than a couple of years in any one ship, we knock up against a great number of our brother naval officers ; and every added year of service means a more widely extended circle of friends and acquaintances.

So, when a ship is lost, you may be pretty certain that in every wardroom throughout the whole Navy someone will be found to remark : “ Poor old So-and so—yes, I knew him very well ; I was ship-mate with him once for about a year ; darned good chap he was, too ! ”

It was so in the case of these earliest naval losses. Directly we heard of them our first impulse was to turn up the Navy List and see if there was anybody we knew in the ships that were lost ; a knot of us, with heads crowded together, would be poring over the book, all trying to read it at once ; and sometimes one of us would suddenly leave the group and

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turn away in silence. He had seen the name of one whom he knew and loved.

But, of course, it did not always necessarily follow that every soul was lost with the ship. There were survivors, many of them having had almost miraculous escapes.

One of these I met not long after. When his ship went down he was amongst a party that had taken refuge on a raft. It was a large raft, and a great number of men had crowded into it. For the present their lives were saved, but their position was not much more enviable than that of their comrades who had gone down with the ship; indeed, to some extent it was much less enviable, for those others had at least found a quick and merciful death, whereas these poor wretches had little prospect beyond that of dying after a lingering torture.

They were in the middle of the North Sea, and without means of propelling their frail craft. A vessel might chance to find them and rescue them, or it might not. Meanwhile, they were up to their waists in water, and the water was bitterly cold. A keen wind was blowing, too; and, when the waves dashed over them, the cutting wind piercing their wet clothing was an agony without cessation.

Only in one way could any relief be had, and that was a method followed by the survivor whom I met; he got over the side of the raft and lowered himself down into the water till all but his head was submerged, clinging with his hands to the rope

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beckets at the side of the raft. In this position the cold was not so keenly felt as when standing soaked through in the icy wind.

At intervals he was obliged to clamber upon the raft again, for it was not possible to remain clinging like this for very long at a time. During these intervals he exercised himself by chafing the limbs of the others near him, in the effort to keep life in them. Half frozen himself, and weakened by exposure, he could not do very much of this before getting exhausted and needing to take a rest. Once he held a brother officer in his arms and tried to cheer him up and keep the spirit alive in him, though it seemed almost a hopeless task, the poor fellow being almost at his last gasp.

"Rub me, oh, rub my arms," whispered the sufferer. He complied at once, and kept on as long as he was able, but presently was forced to stop.

"Oh, don't stop! Keep on rubbing my arms: I shall die if you don't!"

He made a supreme effort and forced himself to renew his task. But the stimulation of his will was not sufficient to urge his utterly wearied flesh; presently his arms refused to work, and fell limp at his sides. As they did so the other man gave a groan and collapsed, falling off the raft, and sank beneath the waves. Others had fallen before this, and more still fell before the rescue of the surviving few was effected. *Eighteen hours* of this awful agony before the rescue came!

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And the one of whom I write turned out the next morning as fresh as a daisy, and at once dashed up to the Admiralty to ask for another ship. He was not a penny the worse for his adventure, and had not even caught a cold; but there were few that had his strength.

9

I have in my possession a pocket atlas which was on any bookshelf at the beginning of the war, and came in very useful during the whole time I was in the ship. It was very frequently in requisition on account of its containing a map not often found in volumes of this description, namely, a full-page map of the North Sea.

This page clearly shows from its begrimed appearance that it has had more use than any other in the atlas. It is scored with pencil-lines half rubbed out, tracing the course taken by the Fleet on cruise after cruise, and there are dots marking the position of rendezvous, with times noted against them, and the precise spots where we were, or where we expected to be at certain hours.

These semi-obliterated markings cover the greater part of the page. They are the witnesses to a vast amount of steaming over the length and breadth of the North Sea.

Hitherto I have, for the most part, touched upon the various aspects of the life of the Fleet in war time, as it was when the ships were in harbour.

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I have tried, so to speak, to take the reader up to our Northern Base and show him how things were there at the beginning. But it must ever be remembered that from the earliest days we spent far more time at sea than we did in harbour.

Afterwards, matters changed considerably, and it became not only practicable but desirable to spend a longer time in harbour; at the beginning, though, we kept the seas almost continually, both from choice and from necessity.

From necessity, because our anchorage was as yet insecure from attack, as I have already said; and from choice, because we desired to meet the enemy's battle-fleet, and join action with him whenever he might choose to come out and show himself.

On the average, we used to go to sea for five days, come back and coal ship, sometimes spending less than twenty-four hours in harbour, and then off to sea again. We kept up this routine for months; and, although it was at times rather strenuous and not a little wearisome, I think none of us can say now, looking back upon it, that we did not enjoy it after a fashion, and it was certainly a good deal better than doing nothing.

People at home, our own folks, knew nothing about these constant cruises; we were not allowed to mention them, of course, and it was not even permissible to state in our letters that we had been coaling ship, as this would reveal the fact that we were in harbour at the date of posting the letter, and were about to start on another sea-trip.

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The general public, of course, was still less aware of our movements at this time ; and, for the matter of that, is probably unable to appreciate even to the present day the constant activity of the Fleet in the early months of the war—an activity which still continues, though now it is not required to be kept up to such a degree as it was then.

We never knew ourselves exactly when we were to leave harbour. The ships always had steam ready at short notice, and the first indication that our brief stay—I cannot call it *rest*—at our anchorage was finished for another few days was a signal from the flagship to raise steam for so many knots.

“ You had better have steam on the capstan at such-and-such a time,” the Captain would then tell the Engineer-Commander, with a view to working the cables.

The eyes of the signalmen were already keenly on the look-out for a string of fluttering bunting at the flagship’s yard-arm. Up would go the signal to be hauled down a little later, and then we began to move.

Squadron followed squadron through the entrance, moving at short intervals, each with its component ships in line ahead.

A very imposing sight it was to watch the ships leaving harbour in this fashion. From the quarter-deck of one’s own ship the foremost ships of the line could be seen rounding the bend and already becoming dim in the distance, so great was the length of the line. Then, right astern, another

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mighty vessel was seen shearing the waves with its lofty stern, and throwing out a white bow-wave which streamed outwards and backwards on either side. Sometimes, if there was anything of a swell running, the next astern would rise till her forefoot was quite out of the water, seeming to be towering upwards as if anxious to advance and come down upon us with a cleaving blow; but I suppose the watch-keepers would not like me to say this, as they are very particular about station-keeping and are a little touchy about any suspicion of not keeping their exact distance apart at all times. Still that is what it *looked* like.

It was at such times, when under way and near the land, that the ships presented the most imposing appearance; out at sea, with no other objects near by which to form a comparison, they looked surprisingly small. I have often noticed this, how a huge vessel of some twenty-five thousand tons and six hundred feet in length would appear, at sea, no bigger than one of the old *Royal Sovereigns* or *Majestics*; but this, I take it, is due to the beautiful lines on which these modern battleships are designed.

Of course the ships themselves were darkened. No masthead steaming lights, no navigation lights were allowed to be shown. The ships were, in fact, in total darkness. Officers of the watch had to keep their proper station in the line merely by sighting the dim loom of the next ahead—for darkness is rarely so thick that this becomes impossible; at such times, when the pitchy blackness of the

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night shut off even the faintest glimpse of the ship ahead, a barrel-buoy would be streamed out at the end of a long line by every ship, and this, trailed just in front of the bows of the next astern, would create a little tumbling swirl of white water, that could be plainly descried from the bridge of the following ship.

All other lights, such as those of cabin scuttles, were, of course, obscured also. Before sailing, the men of the ship's carpenter's staff came round to every mess and cabin, and secured the deadlights firmly down, allowing no chink to remain through which a ray of light might penetrate.

Occasionally one ship would make a short wireless signal to another: "You are showing a light on the port quarter," or some similar message; and then there would be a most careful search for the cause of it. Frequently it was some deadlight not quite tightly secured. Once it was a tiny screw-hole, where the drip-catcher beneath a cabin scuttle had carried away and the screw had fallen out; the resulting hole allowed the light from the electric bulb in the cabin to pour out like a tiny searchlight; not so tiny, however, but what it was clearly visible a mile away! This shows how exceedingly careful we had to be. To smoke a lighted cigarette on the upper deck was absolutely forbidden; much more to strike a match. And those who needed to make their way about the deck had to grope in the darkness, getting their sense of locality corrected from time to time by bumping

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into various obstacles recognisable by their shape—and their feel.

10

When clear of the Pentland Firth the Fleet took up its assigned formation, and proceeded on its destined course. That course might be anywhere in the North Sea—and after many such cruises we might almost say that we had been everywhere in the North Sea. A chart which should contain all our many tracks marked would show a big network of lines leaving very little of this vast area uncovered—East, West, North, and South. From well up beyond the Shetlands we swept close down to Heligoland, from the Yorkshire coast over towards Denmark.

But never once did we set eyes on the “High Seas” Fleet. That much-vaunted force would on rare occasions creep out close to the Frisian Islands, sometimes even getting as far as Terschelling ; but always making quite sure of being able to nip back home again before it could by any possibility be intercepted.

On a fine day the Fleet at sea was a truly magnificent sight when steaming at full speed. It gave such an impression of *Power*. The sea appeared to be covered with the vast assemblage of ships—battleships, battle cruisers, armoured cruisers, light cruisers, and destroyers ; so many of them that the circle of sea which could be viewed from the height of the deck was not sufficient to hold them all,

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many of them being well below the horizon, and only indicating their presence by a faint band of smoke in the sky. I am speaking now of a time when the Fleet was much smaller than it afterwards became ; even in those early days it afforded a deeply impressive sight which one never tired of watching.

One of the earliest of these frequent sweeps of the North Sea was on the occasion of the affair of the Heligoland Bight, when our light craft, followed by some of the battle cruisers, went well inside, and chewed up everything they could find of the enemy's vessels. It was a very thrilling and enjoyable time for those who had the good fortune to be active participators in the affair, no doubt. But it had a further purpose than this : it was a trailing of our coat, an invitation to the enemy to bring out his heavier forces and see what he could do. We, the big ships, were waiting outside for him. But he prudently declined the invitation on this, as on all future occasions, and as we could not stay an indefinite time, we were forced to go home again with the reflection, "No luck." Getting back to the base did not mean much in the way of rest and ease. Colliers were waiting for us there, and as soon as we had dropped anchor they came alongside, and the whole ship's company had to set to and start the unpleasant operation of coaling.

In peace time an average coaling once a month used to be reckoned rather a bore ; but now, when it took place every four or five days, some rather

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stronger terms were needed to describe it. Imagine for yourself, the men who had just completed a strenuous voyage of several hundred miles, stoking, watchkeeping, and carrying out all the other varied duties of the ships; then having to start in and get anything up to a thousand tons of coal on board in quick time, sometimes in a snowstorm, and generally with half a gale blowing. Yet the extraordinary thing is that after a few times the men seemed really to enjoy doing it; at any rate, they went about it with the vim and cheeriness of men engaged in some agreeable form of athletic sports, singing and cracking jokes all the while.

But it was trying work. Sometimes the coaling continued far into the night, too late to think about cleaning ship before the morning; at such times I have seen the mess-deck thick with sleeping men, who had flung themselves down just as they were amongst the coal dust, themselves so black with it that they could scarcely be distinguished from the deck itself in the dim light which the electric lamps gave in that coal-laden atmosphere.

Cleaning ship was little less arduous than the coaling which occasioned it, though not so lengthy. After that came the operation of provisioning ship, which meant taking in stores for a thousand or so men, no light job, as may be understood. And, on occasions, the trilogy was completed by the process of ammunitioning ship, when the weighty projectiles had to be taken on board and lowered down carefully to be stowed in the magazines.

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However, in spite of these trifles, there was a good deal of pleasure in getting back to harbour for ever so brief a spell. For one thing, there was always the mail to look forward to—unless it happened to be blowing so hard that the picket-boat could not go to get it from the depôt ship. Bags and bags of mails, letters, and parcels! It was always a cheery moment when they were heard dumping on the deck as they came rolling down the iron ladder leading from an upper deck hatchway. Then the ship's corporals would take charge of them and open them up in the post office, where the deck soon became piled high with the accumulating heap of letters and papers. Some of the officers, the junior ones especially, could not wait patiently till the sorting was completed, but used to gather round the door of the little compartment, and even invade it, though they were not supposed to do so, hoping to get an early chance of picking out an eagerly looked-for letter.

But when we managed to restrain ourselves, we would sit around the ante-room, doing anything or nothing at all, pretending not to be over anxious about the letters, but all the time only waiting for them to appear. Each time the door opened, every face would be turned towards it, and if it should chance to be only another officer entering there was ill-disguised disappointment. But when at last one of the ship's corporals entered, his arms stacked full of mails, everyone jumped up eagerly, and it was generally a race who should be first to relieve him

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of his burden and spread it out on a place cleared for it on the card table. In a very few minutes every letter was appropriated by its rightful owner, and the deck littered with torn envelopes—for I regret to say that naval officers are not really as tidy as popular opinion believes them to be—while a general hush fell upon the mess, as each man read eagerly his own desired news from Home.

But, oh, the glum face of the officer who was not lucky enough to get a letter! Well, at any rate, he could grab all the picture papers and get first chance at reading them, sitting upon such as he had not yet looked at. This was the only satisfaction that any such unfortunate member was able to enjoy, and he usually made full use of it!

11

When the stay in harbour was not quite so much abbreviated a certain amount of exercise and amusement was to be had ashore. The island of Flotta—a Norse name meaning *Flat Island*—was well adapted for this, and the western part of it, which forms a peninsula, was taken over by the Admiralty to serve as a recreation ground for the Fleet. A number of football grounds were marked out for the men, and pavilions were run up where they could find shelter and purchase refreshments.

For the officers a golf course was laid out, or rather they laid it out for themselves. It was an eighteen-hole course, and although it was fairly

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rough there were many worse ones, and in course of time it became greatly improved, each ship making itself responsible for the upkeep of a green. The popularity of this golf course was amazing; often on a fine day one might put a ball in and wait a couple of hours before being able to commence play. It was certainly a godsend to all devotees of the game, and not to them alone but to their un golfing messmates; for many a time a mouldy-minded pessimist having cast a blight over his little world for the whole of the forenoon would go ashore and work his liver off in a round of golf and come back on board transformed into a proper little ray of sunshine.

In connection with the golf game there is a story told which may or may not be true; I am not in a position to judge, so you can believe it or not just as you like. It is, that certain of the German submarine officers, cruising in Scottish waters, used to bring their vessels close inshore near certain well-known golf links every Saturday afternoon; and, having changed into plain clothes, pulled ashore in their skiff and played a round or two of golf. It is a good story, and I should like to believe it.

There were times when the weather made all shore-going impossible. It would hardly be credited how heavy a sea can get up, and very quickly too, in the inland waters of the Orkneys. "Let go second anchor," became quite a common signal as the winter drew in with its constant gales. Even this precaution was frequently not enough. One

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wild night a merchant steamer dragged and was swept across a battleship's bows, foundering shortly after ; and another, dragging likewise, was wrecked on the shore of one of the islands. Even the heavy anchors and cables of the men-of-war were powerless against the tremendous force of wind and sea, and it was often found necessary to steam at the rate of twelve knots in order to prevent dragging.

That first winter was worse than any which followed, in respect of the weather ; which, in a sense, was just as well, since it enabled us to put up with the succeeding ones with comparative satisfaction and content. Moreover, we had more of the amenities of life when things had once settled down a little.

12

Admiral Jellicoe, in one of his recent speeches, has told how the merchant-ships in attendance on the Fleet more than once came to the rescue of the battleships at their anchorage when there happened to be a submarine scare.

“ Scare ” is hardly the right word to use, for that denotes some meaning of panic, and panic there was none. A rumour of submarines, then.

It is no wonder that such rumours occasionally arose ; the real wonder is that they did not arise every day. For it is so very easy to see a periscope where no periscope exists, especially if you have been knocking about in a picket boat for hours, with your eyes strained to catch sight of such a thing.

And, with the harbour-defences in the embryonic state they were, no rumour could be dismissed as wildly impossible ; if anyone on patrol said he believed an enemy submarine had made its way into the harbour, then all precautions had to be taken with the same care as if this entrance were an absolute certainty.

On these occasions the merchant-ships, especially the colliers, got under way with all despatch and ranged themselves alongside the men-of-war, forming protective buttresses, ready to receive the impact of a torpedo if by so doing they might shelter and save the ships of war.

The colliers themselves were of course without any protection whatsoever. Supposing a torpedo had got home on them they must infallibly have been destroyed. However, it was infinitely more important that the men-of-war should not be destroyed, so this arrangement of the weak sheltering the strong was accepted by the crews of the colliers as part of their duty. What strange and varied happenings the merchant-service coolly accepts as all in the day's work is, I suppose, known to none but the men of the merchant-service themselves ; but I make bold to say that never was a stranger call than this made upon them. And they took it with the calm courageous indifference of the British seaman ; it was open to them to leave their ships tied up alongside and take shelter themselves on board the men-of-war ; but I never heard of a single one of them doing so.

Meredyth came to me one day with a letter in his hand. The mail had just been served out.

"Read this, old man," he said with a grin, "and tell me how I ought to answer it ; I'm a rotten hand at letter-writing."

I glanced at the last page, which chanced to be uppermost as he passed the letter to me, and read the signature, "Marjorie Daw."

"Is it meant for me to read, do you think ?" I asked.

"Oh, that's all right, old man," answered the Oaf ; "I shan't be able to answer it properly unless someone helps me out, and I'd rather it was you than some other silly ass."

Persuaded by this doubtful compliment I turned to the beginning of the letter and read :

"DEAR MR. MEREDYTH,—I was meaning to write you a proper letter, a long one, with lots and lots of news in it—really and truly I was, and I was going to stop at home most virtuously all this afternoon to do it. But now I have to make it quite a different sort of letter altogether, 'cause I don't know if you will ever get it. Fact is, we had a terrible scare yesterday. There was a rumour in the town that your ship had been sunk. Nobody seemed to know how, or where ; but everybody was quite certain that it was true. I didn't pay much attention to the rumour at

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first, but as the day went on and the yarn was still not contradicted I began to feel just the least little teeny bit anxious about you. Now, *do* say you think it was nice of me to be so sympathetic. Well, after tea, there was a terrible ring at the front door, and who should come in but Mrs. Quoggs, the wife of your Gunner ! The poor soul was greatly agitated and really looked rather funny, as she had come out in red carpet slippers and had put her hat on backwards ; also she was weeping copiously, poor thing !

“ She asked to see mother, and the maid showed her into the drawing-room where I was sitting. Of course, I didn’t know her from Adam—or perhaps I should say, Eve ; the explanation came later on. But it was most embarrassing ; then the poor creature flung her arms around my neck and did a sort of shrieky sob right in my ear !

“ ‘ What is the matter ? ’ I asked, as soon as I could disentangle myself.

“ ‘ Oh, Miss,’ she groaned in a magnificent hollow and blood-curdling voice, ‘ have you heard the news, the dreadful news ? ’

“ ‘ *What* news ? ’ said I, beginning to get just a wee bit nervous myself—and no wonder !

“ ‘ Quoggs’s ship has gone to the bottom, and every soul on board with her, so they are saying in town ! ’

“ I knew that your Gunner’s name was Quoggs, so now I began to guess who she was and what she was driving at.

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“ ‘ Oh, it’s true,’ she went on, ‘ and knowing as how your mother was very friendly with one of the officers ’—that was you, of course—‘ I simply *had* to take the liberty of running round to ask if you had heard anything ! ’

“ Mother came in then, and between us we calmed her down as well as we could, but her visit left us both a bit nervy. And this morning we heard that there was a crowd outside the *Western Morning News* office all night long, waiting to hear something more of the rumoured disaster.

“ I daresay it is all very silly. But, anyhow, we haven’t heard anything more, and Mother has asked me to write to ask you to write (that’s an elegant sentence, isn’t it ?) and tell us if anything really has happened. Because it *is* rather worrying, you know, when one can’t hear anything definite, and, anyway, we do hope you are still above water. The ship, I mean.

“ I’ll write you all the news as soon as I hear from you.

“ Mother sends her love.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ MARJORIE DAW.”

“ Silly sort of letter, isn’t it ? ” said the Oaf, as I handed it back to him.

“ How do you mean, silly ? I call it very nice of her to have worried about a useless ullage like you.”

“ By Jove, so it is, then ! I never thought of

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it in that way ! But, all the same, it *is* a silly sort of letter, 'cause supposing I *had* been at the bottom of the sea, how on earth could I write and tell 'em about it ? ”

“ Well, you needn't be so beastly critical. Write back and say, ‘ Thank ye for speerin’—— ”

“ Eh ? ”

“ A local idiom. It means many thanks for kind enquiries. Say you takes it wery kind on her to have put herself about so, and you're all alive and kicking and hope to have the pleasure of demonstrating the fact if ever we get a drop of leave.”

“ All right, old man. If you say so. I'll go and write all that down now, before I forget it.”

I hope the Oaf did not express himself exactly in the form I suggested. But we all had occasion to write “ words to that effect,” both then and afterwards on several occasions. I think our ship was sunk exactly seven different times, according to rumour. The account, as Mark Twain says, was greatly exaggerated. There was, I believe, a small tug bearing the same name as our ship which was sunk in the Channel, and this may have been responsible for one rumour ; but so small an event could hardly have been enough to sink us *seven* times !

However, these rumours certainly did arise and gained credence. Marjorie Daw's remark in her letter about the crowd outside the *Morning News* office was no exaggeration, but sober truth. So much so that certain people could hardly be con-

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vinced to the contrary, and when we reappeared eventually on leave we were made to feel, in some quarters, that we were a suspicious lot of impostors, going about pretending to be alive when by all rights we ought really to be at the bottom of the sea !

14

All the world has heard by this time of the famous "Dummy Ships," so I am not giving away any secrets by mentioning them.

We had certain of them with us, and amongst them one which was intended to be a replica of our own ship. Indeed, the resemblance was marvellous ; and whoever may have been the designer he must have been a man of extraordinary ingenuity and thoroughness to be able to transform an old tramp steamer into such a perfect likeness of a man-o'-war that it might easily deceive the eye of a seaman—yes, and more wonderful still, the eye of an airman looking down on her deck from aloft.

It was certainly a curious experience to stand on the deck of one's own ship and to see her reproduced as if by mirage a few cables' lengths away ; only by a very close and long scrutiny could one detect some small differences which none but a sailor would be able to appreciate.

But what were these Dummy Ships for ? That I cannot, or must not, say. Certain wags in the Fleet circulated a story, when they were first built, to the effect that Jellicoe asked the very same

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question, and was offering a prize of ten pounds to anyone who could tell him what to do with them !

But you need not believe that story if you don't feel like it ; and I can add, from my own personal knowledge, that one of the Dummy Ships really did render most highly important services in a rather critical situation in a certain quarter of the globe on one occasion. I know this must read somewhat vaguely, but the fact remains true, though I may not set down the details.

A story of another Dummy Ship, which I think I may tell, however, concerns the commander of a German submarine. This officer had been drinking heavily, in the effort to counteract the strain of being constantly chased by British destroyers. Of course, the more he drank the more nervous he became ; equally, of course, the more nervous he became the more he drank ; so it was not long before he had got himself into a pretty rocky condition.

One day, however, he was well enough to look through his periscope without seeing double, and, much to his delight, he sighted a British man-of-war in such a position that she offered an easy sitting shot. So away went a torpedo, and the U-boat commander kept his eyes glued to the periscope to witness the explosion. Everything went off well, the muffled roar was plainly heard, and a huge column of water was seen to rise into the air at the side of the stricken ship. But a moment later the commander collapsed to the deck, his face

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ashen-white and twitching. His comrades rushed to him with alarmed enquiries. "Mein Gott!" the unhappy officer replied, "I will never touch drink again! I could have sworn that I saw the ship's turrets blown into the water and *come floating towards me!*" His repentance came too late—and an attack of D.T.'s was the result of his vision.

Not long afterwards his boat was sunk by our patrols and he himself was made a prisoner. Then, with the frankness of a penitent, he related his experiences to his captors, and added that this nerve-racking mistake about the floating turrets would be a lesson to him for life.

"Oh, but you didn't make any mistake, old sport," they told him, "that was one of our Dummy Ships you torpedoed!"

This second shock was altogether too much for him; the unlucky man glared wildly around him, gibbered something quite unintelligible, and from that moment never again recovered his reason.

This, at any rate, is how the story was told to me. I was careful not to spoil it by asking too many questions—and I hope you will be the same!

15

Many thousands of miles did the Grand Fleet steam that autumn and early winter of the first year of the war. Our expectations of a great battle in the first fortnight had long since become a memory to smile over, and already the question

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"Will the German Fleet come out?" was established as a stock argument in every ward-room, gunroom, and mess-deck.

There is no one who loves a debate so much as your Navy man; and this particular subject was one which never failed to draw. In fact, it really divided the Navy into two opposing camps, until after the lapse of indecisive time both sides grew heartily sick of the discussion.

But, for a time, the debate on this topic was a universal favourite. It took many shapes. In its crudest form it was often heard somewhat after this fashion:

"Oh, yes, they'll come out right enough!"

"I bet you they don't!"

"They will, you mark my words."

"I'll eat my hat if they do!"

This shows the debate in its simplest, the protoplasmic variety. In a more highly-developed form it frequently assumed organic intricacies and quite lurid colouring. As, for instance:

"You *must* be a blithering idiot to hold such utterly imbecile ideas! Come out? Why, great Scott, what sort of stuff *can* you have inside your head in place of the ordinary grey matter?"

"Well, old man, drivel away! I don't think I ever listened to such a pathetic example of a man descending to personal abuse when beaten in argument. Got any more of it you would like to unload on me?"

But, as an example of the Higher Criticism, I

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may as well summarise the argument as exemplified between our little Padre and Madden.

The Padre was ever an optimist on the subject. Madden, though not entirely pessimistic, reviewed the matter in the clear cold light of his calculating vision, and concluded that a general Fleet action was unlikely to take place.

"The Germans are not cowards," began the Padre, "they will come out—but not till it suits them."

"They are not cowards," returned Madden, "but also they are not fools. And they will stay where they are."

"Possibly they would be wise to do so; but circumstances will force them to come out, sooner or later. Their Army will demand it; the soldiers will never submit to taking all the hard knocks and allowing the sailors to eat their heads off in idleness and ease. And public opinion in Germany won't stand it either; when so many millions have been spent on building a navy, the people will want to see some return for their money."

"Quite so; if you were talking about our own people, Padre, you would be perfectly correct; but Germany isn't England. There is no such thing as public opinion there, or, if there is, it counts for nothing at all; the Kaiser's opinion is the only one that carries any weight."

"Well, and will not the Kaiser's *amour propre* oblige him to send his Fleet out? After all his posturing as the '*Admiral of the Atlantic*,' how

could he possibly endure the chagrin of yielding the trident to Britain without attempting to put up a fight for it? Besides, the German sailors themselves will clamour to be allowed to prove their mettle."

"Possibly. They will have to do as they are told, however. And even the Kaiser's personal wishes must give way to the higher dictates of policy."

"But my argument is that Germany's best policy is to force a Fleet action. If she should lose the whole of her Fleet in battle she would be no worse off than she is now with the whole of it demobilised. On the other hand, if she should chance to win a big naval action—and you never can tell, some extraordinary luck *might* favour her—why, then she would make what terms she pleased with her enemies, and with England in particular. And why not take such a chance? She would only be gambling with counters; because her ships are nearly all of a type that is rapidly becoming obsolete, and in a very few years' time they will be hopelessly outclassed. I say that Germany has everything to gain and nothing to lose by forcing a Fleet action."

At this point several of the other officers began to gather round to listen to the discussion. "Well done, Padre," was the tone of the general remarks. "Hot stuff at speechifying, isn't he?" "Have a spot, Bishop, you deserve it after that, and I only wish your remarks could get to the ears of the

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Germans and persuade 'em to emerge from the Kiel Canal." "Now then, Wet 'Un, you to play." "Yes. Madden, forward, please!" "Silence now, and let's hear the words of wisdom from the One-and-only!"

Madden did not condescend to take the least notice of this vulgar badinage, and as soon as there was a pause in the hum of voices he began :

"It is a pity, Padre, that you should allow yourself to be such a superficial thinker. A little reflection would show you that the exact opposite of your statement is correct—the Germans have everything to lose and nothing to gain by coming out——"

("Go it, Wet 'Un! Have at him! Good dog, worry him!")

"Remaining where they are, they hold the Russian Baltic Fleet in check; point one. Point two, so long as the High Seas Fleet remains 'a fleet in being' it is a tremendous latent power; it obliges us to keep the whole of our Navy on a war footing, with a great portion of our merchant shipping withdrawn from its proper use to wait on the Fleet's needs, and several hundred thousand men employed in the ships and dockyards who might otherwise be made use of as soldiers; and, at the end of the war, if the German Fleet is still intact, it will be a great factor in the peace negotiations. Point three, by refusing to come out Germany exercises a tremendous pull over the neutrals, as she can bluff them that we are the ones who will not fight; she

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can pretend that we, with all our big Fleet, are abject cowards and the neutrals probably see no reason why they shouldn't believe Germany as much as us. Whereas, if she were to lose her Fleet in a fight—and she almost certainly *would* lose it—the gaff would be blown, and the hesitating neutral nations would be all up against Germany. Depend upon it, the High Seas Fleet won't face us,—not intentionally."

Here the audience began to chip in with arguments and side issues of their own, and the protagonists seized the opportunity to moisten their exhausted tongues with a friendly split.

But if we did not see the High Seas Fleet we did just catch sight of some of the German ships that first winter. It was a very brief glimpse indeed, because as soon as they sighted us they turned and ran for home; and as they happened to be vessels of a faster type than the British squadron it was hopeless to think of pursuing them.

By the way, the German ship which was at the tail of the line, and quite safely out of range, gave us a parting greeting as she scuttled away by making the word "Oxo" by flashlight. Some wag on the signal bridge was responsible for it, I suppose. I do not know what it meant, but it was no doubt intended to be insulting, much as when a rude little boy puts his fingers to his nose on running away from a policeman.

Unfortunately, we were not at all offended, but laughed heartily. We were pleased to see some-

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thing that appeared to indicate the Dawn of Humour in the German Nation.

And so that long first winter wore on. After the autumnal equinox the days began to shorten very rapidly, until there were only about six hours of daylight in the twenty-four. The gales increased, and there was very seldom any possibility of getting ashore. The season was more than usually cold all over the kingdom, and the sailors had not at that time the generous amount of extra warm clothing which was afterwards granted them by the Admiralty; however, gifts of woollies came pouring in from private donors, and to some extent supplied the deficiency.

Yet scarcely a grumble was ever heard; officers and men alike were contented and jolly, and managed to find all sorts of amusements with which to pass the long dark evenings.

So dawned the first Christmas of the war—the day by which so many of the trusting matloes had prophesied that the war would be all over!

It found the Fleet steaming down the North Sea, with the crews at Action Stations, on one of the periodical sweeps towards Heligoland!

III. The Curtain Proves Its Strength

III. The Curtain Proves Its Strength

1

THE first leave, like the first anything, had a peculiar quality attached to it that marked it out from all subsequent leaves.

The ship was in dry dock, undergoing a refit ; this is what made leave-giving possible, for so long as a ship is able to keep the seas she must be maintained in all respects as a fighting unit, with officers and men on board. But when the vessel is in dock her crew is for the time being of as little use to her as his clothes to a man when he goes to bed.

This elegant simile is perhaps a little spoiled by the fact that a certain number of both men and officers have of course to remain on board during the refit to carry on such work as can never be left undone.

I saw a picture the other day of a battleship in dock, done by a great artist. The dock in the

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picture was a floating-dock, and the dark mass stood out in the middle distance against a glowing sunset which cast bright patches of light upon the water. The outlines of both ship and dock were blurred and undefined—whether for the sake of artistic effect or with the object of placating the censor at the Admiralty Press Bureau I cannot say; but the result was certainly most effective, a beautiful and inspiring tone-poem.

But the real thing doesn't strike one as very poetic, when one has to live on board the ship under these conditions.

In the first place, even the best of dry docks is—not to put too fine a point upon it—smelly. Seven or eight different smells are always clamouring for precedence, and any one of them would be sufficient of itself to fit out the native quarter of an Eastern city with the necessary aroma. One of the least unpleasant is that which emanates from the anti-fouling composition with which the ship's bottom, after being scraped, is now re-coated; this has a pungent scent which rather resembles burning indiarubber mingled with ether fumes; and in its dire effects it is not unlike some whisky we had in a former ship of mine, where a dishonest wine-steward abstracted about half the spirit and filled up the cask with sea-water.

The artist's presentment of a ship in dock left out also another of the main features of the situation, namely, the noise.

Of the day-time noises I say nothing, except that

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every single brand of craftsman that can possibly have anything to do with the repairing of a ship and its contents is plying his trade and his tools all the time; and these tools are not of the quiet old-fashioned type, worked by hand and only now and then emitting their sounds of tapping or scraping, but tools such as the hurry of modern times has made necessary, driven by steam, gas, compressed-air, hydraulics, and electricity, all of them deafening and nerve-racking, and all of them working simultaneously at full power.

Day-time noises, however, do not form a legitimate object for a grumble, as they are in the most literal sense "all in the day's work"; but what can be said for the fiend in human shape who breaks the brief peace of the stilly night by suddenly dealing about a dozen clanging blows with a heavy hammer on some unoffending piece of metal, and then as suddenly ceasing? He really does exist, this sleep-dispelling ghoul: I have heard him; but why he exists is a problem as hard to solve as that of the usefulness of the mosquito!

Then we have also to contend with the fact that, when in dock, the electric lighting of the ship is supplied from the dock itself, which means that every now and then the lights go out, when they are changing circuits or swapping dynamos or something of that sort, and the ship is suddenly plunged into total darkness. This always happens at most inopportune moments.

As, for example, when I was picking my way along

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the half-deck, a place once as bright and glittering as the palace-scene in a pantomime, but now like the back shop of a marine store dealer ; advancing towards me from the opposite direction, and negotiating the obstacles like a hen in silk stockings crossing a muddy road, appeared our little Padre. I suppose I looked just as funny as he did, but I saw him and he didn't see me, so I laughed. And then the lights went out suddenly. There was an exclamation.

"Padre," I said rebukingly, "I believe I heard you say a bad word !"

"And so would you," the unrepentant little cleric retaliated, "if you had barked your shins against the sharp edge of a confounded wash-deck locker like I've just done. And how I'm going to get out of this Hampton Court Maze which the mateys have been amusing themselves by erecting here is more than I can tell."

"Stay where you are," I said, "and I'll come over and give you a hand."

And then my foot caught in a length of iron piping, and over I went.

"Well, anyhow," remarked the callous little brute of a parson—and I could *feel* him grinning in the darkness—"the bad word *you* said was a badder word than the bad word *I* said !"

And then the lights came on again. The "Dock-yard Mateys" were responsible for a good deal more than incidents of the above nature ; they and their work gave rise to much comment, some-

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times complimentary and sometimes very much the reverse.

There was a time—it seems long years ago now—when a dockyard refit used to extend over a comfortably long period, sometimes running well into three months. I do not say that everyone took things very leisurely, because there appeared to be quite a lot of bustling in evidence; but it never occurred to anyone that there was a case for “speeding-up.” The normal allowance of time for a refit was then six weeks, but it was a very elastic period and the stretching process generally took place.

Then came a time when an order was issued to the effect that no refit was to take longer than one month. One month! We stood aghast at such an unheard of order, and everyone said the thing was impossible, absurd!

But now—why, fancy being able to jog along sleepily for a whole month over a refit!

In the few days that were allotted to us the mateys certainly got through a power of work. They seemed to be slow enough in doing it, and at the end of each day there was not a great deal to show for the day's work; but when it was all over and the ship cleared up and ready for sea, one could look scarcely anywhere without finding some transformation that had been worked above decks or below.

So there must have been a good deal of real honest work put in. Unfortunately, not all the

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workers followed the example of the majority. You might think that in a time of great national need every single man would lay himself out to do his utmost and a bit more to help the country; especially when engaged on such a job as this, remembering that a ship refitting is a ship lost to the Fleet for the time being, and that consequently the *Curtain of Steel* is just that much less strong until the ship can go to sea again.

But—well, here is an actual incident of the refit.

Time, during a stand-easy, and just before the sounding of the Buzzer signal when work has to start again.

The silence is disturbed by a sound of hammering somewhere below, and, immediately after, the following conversation is overheard.

First Workman (indignantly addressing his mate who was hammering): “ ’Ere, knock off! Buzzer ’asn’t gone yet!”

The hammering at once ceases.

Second Workman: “ Oh, ’asn’t it? My mate said it ’ad!”

Work not resumed until the sounding of the Buzzer.

Now, the marvel to my mind is that the *decent* working-men, who are in a large majority, don’t deal with creatures of this sort on their own and quietly drop them over the side or something of that sort. Because it is just these miserable, work-shy loafers who are answerable for all the distrust and ill-feeling between the “classes” and the

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“masses.” These individuals spoil the game for the good men; they cast a stigma upon labour and trades-unionism, and bring the name of workmen into contempt. The employer is not altogether to be blamed if he believes the rot to have spread further than perhaps it really has; he is bound, by the nature of things, either to trust his men or to suspect them, and if these “wait-for-the-buzzer” gentry make themselves prominent, it is hardly to be wondered at if the employer decides to be on the safe side, and treat all his men with suspicion.

The working man has many enemies, but the deadliest of them all is the working-man who won't work.

It is a poignant contrast, when the officer who has charge of that part of the ship where the men are “waiting for the buzzer,” paid about half as much as they are, and risking his life every time he goes to sea, sweats through the long day and well into the night hours, with no idea of praise or reward, but simply to help on the efficiency of the ship in that little department where he happens to find himself placed.

As touching the question of the matey's pay, however, the remark of another workman probably represents the opinions of the sound majority. “Here am I drawing my eight quid a week, and my brother in the trenches is getting a bob a day; it seems all wrong, but what am I to do? I should be a fool to refuse the money when it is offered to me! The mistake lay in not keeping down the

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wages from the start; prices would have kept down too then, and there wouldn't have been all this outcry."

Which seems a perfectly just summing up of the situation.

2

The greater part of the ship's company knew nothing of the joys of refitting. On the day the ship went into dock, the men were mustered on the upper deck, and each one was given a railway pass together with a carefully drawn up paper of information concerning times of arrival at various stations and connections necessary to take them to their homes.

They were a merry crowd. After these months in the North Sea the prospect of seeing Home again was quite enough to make them forget all their troubles.

Goodness only knows where they had got their travelling cases and boxes from, or in what part of the ship these had been stowed in readiness, but every man had a package of some sort. A very favourite form was the Japanese basket with a strap around its middle; all sailors appear to love this arrangement, though it looks a decidedly awkward thing to handle. Others were possessed of portmanteaus and suit-cases which mostly had the appearance of having once belonged to the officers, discarded by the original owners probably at a time when the luxury of a nice new shiny bag

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was irresistible, and now furbished up and made to do duty again in a humbler walk of life.

Many and varied were the plans made by the sailors for the forthcoming leave; "How am I going to spend it?" observed one of them—"why I am going to stop in bed the whole time, and eat till I can't see!"—a programme which certainly promised enjoyment of a sort; of a different sort from that indulged in by another man who afterwards wrote home to his friends, "Would you mind telling me what I did when I was home on leave?" *He* must have spent several hours of glorious life!

3

When it was all over, and we had returned once more to take up again the routine of ship life with a prospect of a good many months of it ahead of us before another turn of leave, we beguiled ourselves with comparing notes.

The young surgeon had spent five nights in town, and on four of these had been to see "To-Night's the Night"; and his artistic soul had been so satisfied with that musical banquet that with a view to further feasting on it he brought back with him gramophone records of every single air. These he insisted on playing on every opportunity; sitting down caressingly by the side of the torture-box and faithfully rendering every record in his outfit, until we began to wish that he had spent his leave in the wilds of the country!

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Madden also had been in London. But he came back gloomy and depressed, and did not appear to have enjoyed himself at all.

"Didn't you see *anything* worth looking at?" we asked him.

"Well, one day I very nearly saw a street accident."

"Very nearly saw one? What do you mean?"

"Just exactly that. I was on top of a 'bus, and away on our starboard quarter there came dashing along a butcher's cart, not under control, yawing about heavily. The man had dropped the reins and was yelling out like anything, frightened out of his wits. Just as it was coming up alongside the horse suddenly turned eight points and bolted up a side street, so we couldn't see what happened, but we heard a terrific crash! Our conductor pulled up the 'bus and ran back to see the show. In a minute or two he came back looking as sick as a dog, and reported "Man not 'urt. 'Orse not 'urt. Cart not 'urt. *Nothink!*" He was fairly disgusted, and so were we all. And that's the most thrilling thing I saw in town!"

Another officer had spent his leave at the front in France, where the fighting had already by this time settled down into the form of trench warfare in which it was to continue for three long years. This member of our mess was quite a hero to us, as the fashion of visiting the front had not yet fully set in, and he had to pull several important strings before obtaining permission to cross the Channel.

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But beyond the fact that he had been treated as a Distinguished Visitor, and had witnessed with his own eyes the magnificent cheeriness of our own men, we didn't get many yarns out of him.

In fact the best yarns were not, strictly speaking, leave-stories at all, but culled from pals who had drifted home from various parts of the world, on furlough or invalided. It is astonishing how many such old acquaintances of this sort one knocks up against in London—but, now I come to think of it, this remark has probably been made before.

There was a story that came all the way from Mesopotamia. It concerned an Arab Sheik, one of a tribe friendly to us. This son of the desert had begged to be taken up in an aeroplane—a proceeding which argued an extraordinary amount of courage, both physical and moral, if you remember that the unsophisticated dwellers in the wilderness believe an aeroplane to be driven by Djinnns who may at any moment rebel against the magician in the pilot's seat. But the Sheik was given his joy-ride, and all the rest of the tribe stood and watched with amazement and awe. Presently a cloud concealed the machine from sight ; and a loud wailing arose from the assembled tribesmen, who believed that their chief had been snatched away by the evil spirits of the air. However, the aeroplane reappeared presently and after a while descended in safety. The Sheik stepped out, greatly elated, and explained to his friends :

“Ye saw when the clouds came down from

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heaven and swallowed us up ? How long, think ye, was I hid from your eyes ? ”

“ It was but while a man might count a hundred, lord.”

“ So it may have seemed to you. But know ye that in that time we flew to the city of Stamboul, and saw the Caliph, the Father of the Faithful. He is a slight-built man with a black beard.”

“ Allah is great ! The Caliph is even as thou describest ! ”

“ And, after that, we soared upwards and upwards, like an eagle that rises till he becomes as a black speck in the heavens, till we reached the sun.”

“ Bismillah ! But, lord, how wast thou not burnt ? ”

“ Was not the cloud with us ? That quenched the heat, so we felt it no more than the mild warmth of Springtime. I will tell you of the wonders I saw there another time. But that was nothing ; after this we went on further upward still, and visited Heaven itself.”

“ And what sawest thou there ? ”

“ It is not permitted to tell ! But if my lips were unsealed I could ravish your ears for a lifetime with the tale of the glories revealed to me. Mahomet himself, with thousands of the faithful attending on him ! And the houris—Ah ! ”

From that moment the Sheik was believed in and obeyed as if he had been a being from another sphere ; and if the British needed any task performed which was uncongenial to the native mind, all they had

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to do was to send for this particular Sheik, who would set his tribe to do the work without the slightest trouble.

Shorter but rather more pungent was the story retailed by a submarine officer just home from the Mediterranean. One of his messmates was a man who took great pride in his personal appearance and was especially particular about his linen, which he would not entrust to the local washerwomen but sent all the way home to a steam laundry in Portsmouth. On one or two occasions, however, the linen was returned in a very unsatisfactory condition, which made the Lieutenant so irate that he took pen in hand and sat him down to write a scathing rebuke, pointing out the enormity of the crime with all the virulence and vehemence at his command. Then he awaited the reply. In due course it came, and he opened it to read with satisfaction the expected apology.

It read: "Yours of the 17th ulto. to hand. Composition good, Spelling bad."

4

But the greatest event of the leave was the Oaf's engagement.

We did not find it out for some little time, and then only by the fact that every mail brought Meredyth a letter in the same feminine handwriting.

You must understand that naval officers are never in the least degree reticent about the private affairs

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of their messmates, and not at all backward in putting leading questions to extract information if they feel curious.

"What's the meaning of this, Oaf? Here you are, getting a letter every mail from some fair young thing! Do you mean to say you have been and gone and got engaged? *You?*"

The blush upon Meredyth's open face too readily betrayed the truth.

"Well, I didn't mean to," he apologised; and this remark not unnaturally increased the volume of chaff to which he was subjected.

"As a nice point of naval etiquette," thoughtfully observed the Captain of Marines, "it is a delicate question whether we ought to celebrate the occasion by putting up spots to the Oaf, or whether he should put them up to us."

"I'm blest if I'm going to stand drinks to a thirsty mob like you," said the Oaf, "so don't you think it!"

"No need for you to chip in with your opinion," calmly continued Hotham; "the matter is too subtle for your understanding. What do *you* think about it, Paymaster? You've been a long time in the Service and should know the traditions."

The Paymaster, thus consulted, appeared to cogitate deeply, and in a few moments pronounced judgment—"I think that as the Oaf is in a minority of one, the wishes of the majority ought to prevail. He will therefore be our host. And, as a pretty compliment to him, we will afterwards invite him

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to have two-pennor'th of whatever he likes at our expense."

"Oh, all right," grumbled Meredyth—who was really as pleased as he could be—"Wine Steward, bring out some of the Number One Champagne!"

Not many members of the mess knew who was the lady of his choice. Curiosity and questioning stopped short of such intimate details, as is always the case. But the little Padre and myself were quite sure in our own minds that the lady was that very nice Marjorie Daw. And as we knew them both so well, we tackled the Oaf on the subject when we were alone together.

He admitted the fact at once with a cheery smile and more blushing.

"Well," said the Padre, "there's one thing about it, you've chosen a very pretty girl."

"Oh, d'you think so? I don't think she's at all pretty."

This was rather disconcerting. Especially as Marjorie was undoubtedly very pretty. However, every eye forms its own beauty, and so I suppose forms also its own lack of that quality. I reflected that Meredyth was therefore to be commended on having based his choice on something more valuable and lasting than mere outward beauty, and I tactfully broke a rather awkward silence by observing:

"At any rate, she has a very sweet disposition!"

"Hm! You don't know what a temper that girl's got!" said the Oaf.

This was worse still. The Padre and I looked at

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each other, not knowing quite what to say next. But the situation was too much for the impetuous cleric, who turned upon Meredyth and blurted out what was in the minds of both of us :

“Then why the dickens did you get engaged to her ?”

“Oh, I dunno,” beamed the Oaf. “I had no intention of doing anything of the sort. We were out for a walk together, and, well, somehow I just couldn’t help it, that’s all.” After a moment’s pause he added lamely : “I don’t know anybody that can beat her at spinning for mackerel.”

We let it go at that, and did not attempt any further interrogations. But I think we understood, both of us, that the real reason of Meredyth’s falling in love was—simply that he had fallen in love. And that is the best of all possible reasons.

5

Trythall did not return to the ship. He was appointed to a destroyer, in command, while he was on his leave, and had to hurry off to the port where she was to be commissioned.

Needless to say, he was overjoyed at his new appointment. “I am sorry enough at having to leave the old hooker and all you fellows,” he wrote to me, “but there’s nothing like having a ship of your own and running your own show. Let alone the fact that there’s a good deal more chance of

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seeing life in a destroyer than ever there is likely to be in a jolly old battleship."

I wonder what Myra thought about it.

At the end of the letter there was an invitation to me to break my journey at the port where he was fitting out his new ship when I took my leave ; and though he had overlooked the fact that this would take me about three hundred miles out of my way I nevertheless decided to put up with the longer journey in order to see him in all the glory of his new command.

I found the *Windsor Castle* in that state of apparent chaos which is always seen in a ship just taken over from the contractor and about to be fully commissioned. To a casual glance it looked as though about half the ship's fittings were still to be built in, and likewise as if a large portion of the builder's yard had been dumped down on the decks and forgotten ; and a shoregoer would probably have felt that he was being too sanguine in predicting that the ship might possibly be ready for sea in another three months.

"Saturday week we shove off out of this and join the Fleet," Trythall said. "We're going to be up with you, you know, so I shall be able to visit the old junk now and then. But come and have a look round, and tell me what you think of her."

The *Windsor Castle* was one of the very latest type of destroyers. Compared to the old "thirty-knotters" of years ago she was almost palatial. The captain's cabin was quite a roomy apartment,

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and even when the curtain was drawn over in front of the neat little brass-railed bunk there was space enough left to pull up a couple of comfortable arm-chairs in front of the tiny anthracite stove, the brass funnel of which was shining like gold ; evidently Trythall had secured a good steward and had set him to work.

Other hands had been at work also ; over the scuttle and across the doors and the bunk-space were pretty cretonne curtains, which had all been sewn, so Trythall told me, by his "Missus," who had chosen the pattern herself. And there was a new bunk-spread, also her handiwork, of navy blue cloth, embroidered in gold with his name and the list of ships in which he had served, beginning with the *Britannia* and ending with the *Windsor Castle*. There were photographs also of his wife and "Miss Trythall," lots of them, scattered about in various places ; and, altogether, it was a very cosy-looking cabin.

But it was, of course, the upper deck with the guns and the torpedo-tubes which absorbed all the enthusiasm of the *Windsor Castle's* captain.

I learnt also that he himself was travelling south that night, on six days' leave, as it appeared that his presence on board was not essential. Lucky chap !

He suggested that we should travel down together, and that I should spend a forenoon with him at his house before going on to my own home. So the next morning we found ourselves at his pretty little place off the Dorchester Road.

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"Billy's as proud as a cat with two tails," Mrs. Trythall informed me as soon as we had settled down comfortably in front of a cheerful fire; it was too chilly at that time of the year to sit out in the pleasant garden, though we could look out of the big French windows and see the beech tree beneath which shade we had lazily stretched ourselves that summer afternoon—years and years ago, it seemed now. And as I cast a glance out upon the garden there came flying down and settling on the grass a disconsolate-looking thrush—I wondered whether it were the identical songster that Marjorie Daw had regaled with pieces of cake at our Sunday afternoon tea-party; but he was silent now and a-cold, feeling the hard grip of the winter.

"Yes," continued Myra, "there's no holding Billy now that he's got a destroyer——"

"Shall I tell you why?" interrupted Trythall with a merry grin. "It's because I've never been my own boss before. In a battleship I'm a mere dogsbody—and when I come home here I'm a good deal less than that, a poor downtrodden worm! Now, for the first time in my life I shall have nobody to order me about! Once aboard the lugger—Oh, I say, Myra, that's a dirty low game, buzzing cushions at me from behind my back!"

I could see that she was playing up to old Trythall's high content of himself with all her power. But when she was not smiling her mouth in repose had a strained wistful droop at the corners which ordinarily was not seen there. A thought was

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troubling her which after a while could not be kept in restraint, though the words were forced into a casual tone, as if the question were really hardly worth asking: "I suppose a destroyer is really quite a safe vessel to be in?"

She looked towards me in speaking; but her husband hurriedly forestalled my answer.

"Safe?" he echoed, "why there's nothing to touch a destroyer for safety! As far as danger goes I consider that I am practically out of the war from this time on. I wouldn't go back to a battleship for anything you could offer me—I value my life too much! The big ships may bump into a mine at any minute, while we in our destroyers glide gracefully over the minefield, thanks to our shallow draught."

"But the gales? Destroyers look such flimsy little things!"

Trythall sent a rapid glance in my direction, as if to tell me that it was up to me to tell the next lot of lies. And I would cheerfully have lied till all was blue in such a good cause, but fortunately there was little need for me to draw upon my imagination.

"You would be astonished," I said, "to see what an amount of weather destroyers can stand, not only with perfect safety but with comparative comfort. They are so well built, you see, and specially designed to cope with heavy seas; and, really, they often stand the weather a good deal better than the big ships."

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All this was perfectly true. But Trythall appeared to expect a better effort from me than this ; so I went on :

"Your husband is quite correct, Mrs. Trythall, when he says that he is just as safe now as if he were ashore ; in fact, he is a good deal safer, when you think of all the accidents that can happen in the course of an ordinary walk or tram-ride. Don't you worry about that."

"I suppose you're right ; I hope you are," she replied. "I know it's silly of me to imagine such things."

"Silly ? I should jolly well think it was," laughed Trythall, "so put all those ideas out of your head at once, little woman."

"Where's Miss Trythall ?" I enquired, with an effort to change the topic ; "I should like to see her before I go, and I'll have to be hopping it presently."

"She is somewhere about the place, I believe. Perhaps I had better go and look for her, or else there's no telling what time she may appear. She went out for a walk with her Nannie this morning, and I don't know whether they are back yet or not."

As soon as she was outside the door Trythall turned to me and drew a folded newspaper out from his coat pocket, thrusting it into my hands.

"Stow it away in one of your pockets for God's sake, old man," he said in a quick voice ; "keep

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it out of sight, and don't let on that you've got it ! ”

“ But why ? ”

“ I always go into the village and get one every morning. If the Missus asks for it I'll tell her there were none to be had to-day, or any ruddy lie I can think of. Button that one well up inside your coat, and take care the end of it doesn't stick out.”

Not understanding, but willing to oblige, I opened the paper in order to fold it into a smaller compass to fit my pocket. And as the open page appeared I read the headline in big letters :

“ One of H.M. Destroyers lost with all hands.”

“ That's all right, old man,” I said with a comprehending nod ; “ she shan't know anything about it if *I* can help it.”

6

Back again with the Fleet, and the leave already becoming a dim vision of the past.

We soon felt as if we had never been away from it at all, and quickly fell into the old routine again.

More cruising, more sweeping the North Sea—and more coaling !

Plenty of drills and exercises too, and practice firing of all sorts, from full-charge “ big stuff ” down to one-inch sub-calibre, more commonly described as “ piff.”

There was an occasion when the enemy thought they had discovered one of our haunts ; and no

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doubt they would not be long before laying an extensive minefield in the vicinity—a work which those painstaking and very thorough gentry must have spent a considerable amount of time and labour in accomplishing, without the slightest return for their trouble !

They were enabled to undertake minelaying operations of this nature by reason of the development of their submarine mine-droppers, which began to make their appearance about this time. At the commencement of the war there were none of these specialised craft in existence ; and credit is due to the foresight and hustle of the German Admiralty, which gave full scope to its naval inventors and builders as soon as ever it was seen that the surface-craft were bound to be driven off the face of the seas ; so that by the time these had been cleared off—in spite of every imaginable trickery and disguise as peaceful neutral merchantmen—the submarine minelayers were ready to take their place.

The capture of one of these diabolical vessels and its triumphant exhibition in the Thames brought home to the minds of the general public the actual fact of their existence ; but it may be doubted whether anyone outside the Navy understood even then what an enormously difficult task it is to deal effectively with this unseen danger. A surface minelayer can be detected, and the area in which she is seen can then be swept ; but when the hidden enemy can come in safety and mine any spot in

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the hundreds of miles of shallow water which surround the coasts of Britain, the task of discovering the danger-areas is one that may well seem almost beyond human powers. Yet it has been dealt with, and very effectually; and this enormous undertaking, little appreciated by the general public, is by no means the least part of what the Navy has done and is doing.

Mines can only be laid in shallow water. In the open sea there was another danger to be reckoned with in the shape of floating mines, which the Germans scattered plentifully—or got other people to do the dirty work for them—in complete disregard of the Hague Convention which laid down that any such mines must be so constructed as to become harmless after a few hours. Germany signed this and many similar agreements with her tongue in her cheek, knowing that other nations would be foolish enough to keep their pledged word while she could reap a “military advantage” by breaking it; what did a scratch of the pen matter?

And what did it matter, either, if these same floating mines should cause the destruction of harmless merchantmen, neutrals as well as British? No German ship would be endangered—because no German ships were at sea—and it was of little consequence what happened to the ships and people of other nations.

It is but fair to add that the mines which strewed the waters of the North Sea were not all of them deliberately placed there. Every heavy storm

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always plays a certain amount of havoc amongst the most carefully laid minefield, the mines of which break from their moorings, at least some of them do, and drift away to the beach or to the open sea as the winds and currents direct them. And such storms work quite impartially on British minefields as well as on those of the enemy.

But whether scattered of malice aforethought or drifting by chance, the floating mines were undoubtedly a source of some danger to the Fleet at sea, and called for a constant and careful look-out.

So you will understand the feelings of one of our watchkeepers, who said with disgust at the close of one of our frequent and fruitless cruises, "Well, the war has been going on for a good many months now, and so far I've only seen one German—and he was a floating-mine!"

7

Besides floating mines, the menace of submarines had to be taken into account whenever we put to sea.

I cannot honestly say that we worried very much about them. On the whole, I think they were far more afraid of meeting us than we were of meeting them. And really I don't blame them; for it must be pretty alarming to any unfortunate U-boat to see a mighty fleet come sweeping towards it at high speed, spreading for miles on either side, with hosts of destroyers and light cruisers in attendance; and to know that in every single one of all these

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hundreds of ships there are eyes searching the face of the waters for the smallest glimpse of a periscope showing itself, and guns by the hundred ready to loose off at a moment's notice. Small blame, I say, to the U-boats if on such occasions they preferred to make themselves scarce.

We did meet them, several times, and more than once steamed right through them. But although we took the needful precautions and treated the danger as a very real one there did not appear to be much cause for us to put ourselves to any great trouble; the "gallant U-boat commanders" were on the look-out for something nice and easy, an unarmed tramp or a fishing boat, and were not at all keen on standing up to ships that could retaliate. They probably heaved a sigh of great relief when the Fleet had passed and left them unhurt. Then they were free to go back to the Fatherland and spin what yarns they liked; for at this time we had not thoroughly learnt the art of submarine-hunting, and although some of them were put down the greater number were still able to go about their evil work with comparative impunity.

8

This comparative impunity, however, was already lessening week by week, almost day by day, as we devised new and effectual methods of dealing with U-boats. When I say "we," I mean that subsidiary navy which did not loom so big in the public

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eye as the Grand Fleet, but was equally important in its own particular sphere; those trawlers, drifters, yachts, motor-launches and patrol craft of all types, manned by the most varied personnel from the smart destroyer officer to the rough North Sea fisherman who felt mighty uncomfortable in the navy rig with which he had been kitted up.

The story of this lesser navy has been partly written since those days, and when it is told in its full completeness it will be indeed a thrilling story, crammed with the adventures and the brave deeds of the men who faced death and danger in their fight with the U-boats—if they can ever be induced to speak about such things; for they are a silent, dour crowd, most of them.

But it was not always left to these hardy little craft to reckon with the German submarines. There was at least one occasion of which I was a personal witness when a battleship encountered a U-boat; the battleship continued its voyage unscathed after the encounter, but the U-boat never returned to Germany!

We were, at the time, steaming in fleet formation down the North Sea. I know I have mentioned a similar fact a good many times already, and the reader will probably get rather tired of the repetition; but then, we *did* occupy ourselves after this fashion so very frequently, so I am not to blame if the record becomes a trifle monotonous; it cannot be so monotonous as the actual cruises were to us who took part in them, since they were a constant

source of great expectations followed by dull disappointment.

This time it was different. Something really *did* happen !

Three German submarines suddenly appeared all at once just ahead of the Fleet and directly in our path.

In all probability they were returning to Germany after a cruise of two or three weeks in British waters where they had been harrying the merchant-shipping. It was their usual custom to make certain points on our coast and thence take a bearing to start them on their Eastward voyage across the North Sea. These three boats had taken their departure, and probably expected nothing so little as a meeting with the Grand Fleet when they were well on their homeward voyage.

One of them dived immediately, evidently thinking discretion the better part of valour, and so got safely away, not knowing the fate of the other two but presumably hoping to get in company with them again later and exchange reports of the proceedings.

The second one fired a torpedo at one of our battleships. Whether the man who fired it singled out one particular ship for his special aim or whether he just fired into the brown cannot be known ; but either way, the shot was unsuccessful. The battleship which was most nearly approached by the torpedo signalled that she had been narrowly missed ; and that was all. Perhaps there may have been more torpedoes than this one discharged, but if so

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they went so wide of the mark that they were never even reported.

Then this second submarine also dived, and got away without venturing a further attack.

The third submarine was not so fortunate. Before it had time to dive the Fleet was almost on top of it.

The nearest battleship saw the chance, and took it. The U-boat made every endeavour to escape, but the battleship was on its track. There was but one faint hope for the luckless submarine, to zig-zag rapidly and thus throw the pursuer off its course. But this is where the exceeding handiness of our biggest ships came in. The mighty battleship, turning like a little picket-boat, zig-zagged also, and followed the movements of the submarine with ease, gaining distance at every turn. It was like nothing so much as a greyhound chasing a hare.

In a few minutes it was all over. The great ship caught the unhappy U-boat on her ram, lifted it clean out of the water, and *broke* it, as you would break a stick across your knee. The two ends fell off this way and that, and slid down into the waves to disappear for ever.

It is perhaps worthy of remark that Germany raised an aggrieved outcry over the loss of this particular U-boat, accusing some British merchant vessel of having destroyed it by "unfair means." Yet, of course, the true facts of the case must have been perfectly well known to the German Admiralty from the reports of the other two submarines which succeeded in getting safely home. Just as in their

shore-fighting, the Germans have invariably heralded their intentions of using some fresh methods of atrocity by making some absurd accusation against their enemies beforehand. Their murderous campaign against merchant vessels soon after assumed a more malignant form.

9

So many people have written descriptive accounts of the Battle of Jutland that I rigorously refrain from adding to the number, and only mean to indulge in one or two comments on the affair.

The Jutland Battle was an accident. What was the purpose of the German Fleet in cruising in that particular direction is known only to the Germans themselves. It remains a mystery, and will continue to be one until some candid official of the German Admiralty pleases to give the solution. But one thing at least is absolutely certain: they never intended to meet the Grand Fleet. Not only did they never intend to, but they never expected to and were disagreeably surprised when they found that a meeting was at last unavoidable.

This much is perfectly evident from the way in which they used their utmost endeavours to break off the action, from the first moment when they discovered that instead of chasing the easy prey of an isolated lot of battle-cruisers they had been lured along towards the guns of a fleet of battle-ships speedily coming to meet them.

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If ever the Germans wanted to fight, then was their opportunity. Never again could they reasonably expect to meet us under circumstances so favourable to themselves; three of our battle-cruisers had been sunk in the running fight which preceded the main encounter, thus tending to equalise the balance in a class of vessels, very important in a fleet-action, in which the German inferiority was more marked than in any other type of ship. Besides this, our battle-fleet was not on this occasion at its full strength, some important units being absent; and quite early in the action the *Warspite*, one of the most powerful ships in the fleet, was disabled and rendered incapable of taking any further part in the fighting.

So that, taking everything into consideration, here was a magnificent opportunity, if the Germans chose to take it. But, instead, their only aim was to break off and avoid fighting; and this they eventually succeeded in doing, aided by luck in the weather conditions and the falling dusk, and—let it be admitted—by quite skilful manœuvring; but not before they had been so badly hammered that they simply dared not publish their real losses, and are afraid or ashamed to do so to this very day.

The only other comment of the sort I wish to make is that Admiral Jellicoe's handling of the Fleet on this occasion was a super display of masterly seamanship such as probably no one but himself could have given. It was the admiration of every officer in the Fleet, and, although not

attended with the full measure of success which it deserved, will certainly take foremost place in the records of naval history as the classic example of the attempt to bring to action an unwilling opponent.

But I must not poach on the grounds of the naval critics and experts who are welcome to spread themselves on these subjects with serious and lengthy ponderosity.

It is more in my line to tell of one particular incident in this great Jutland fight; the story has no definite beginning or end, and no plot, but its particular merit is that it happens to be true.

10

I will call the ship the *Gemsbok*, because that does not happen to be her name. She was a Light Cruiser—and her story does not read a bit like the Ballad of the Revenge. “One against fifty-three” was all very well in Greville’s day, when naval guns lobbed out their round iron shot at intervals of several minutes; shot which sometimes hit but much more often missed—and even if they did hit the chances were that no more damage would be done than the splintering of the wooden walls of those times.

But when a modern shell can be relied upon to hit a ship three times out of five at a range of several miles, and a single projectile that gets home can make a light cruiser into a white-hot mass of old junk in a fraction of a minute—under these circum-

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stances any attempt at imitating the Revenge act is not at all heroic but purely suicidal, and, what is more, extremely foolish.

The *Gemsbok* had to perform something like this act, however ; and more from necessity than from choice.

"We're in for it now," said the Captain on the bridge.

"So I see," said the Commander at his side ;
"what do you intend to do about it ?"

"Do ? Why cut and run," said the Captain.

"Right down through the line ?" said the Commander.

"Where else is there to go ?" said the Captain.

Such a situation as the *Gemsbok* found herself in you would say, if you were a Naval Expert, was one which could only have been conceived in the brain of a writer of sea-stories—the kind which are given away as school prizes. The correct disposition of a fleet in action makes no allowance for such an absurdity. The main battle-fleet should be here, battle-cruisers there, armoured cruisers, lighter craft, and destroyer flotillas in such and such prescribed formations and positions ; all very precise and regular ; as formal as the State Lancers at a Royal Ball, where you would *never* expect one of the high-born ladies to break away and execute a *pas seul* down the lines of the dignified spectators !

"Blest if I know how we got into this," said the Commander.

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“Blest if *I* know how we’re ever going to get out of it,” said the Captain; “how we got here is simple enough; when you have about five hundred ships of assorted kinds all playing a game of Catch-as-catch-can combined with Here-we-go-round-the-mulberry-bush, is it any wonder that we have got into the happy position of a dog on the Derby racecourse?”

In the control-top above their heads the gunnery lieutenant was monotonously singing out the ranges; five four double-0, five three five 0, five three two five. Closing rapidly.

“See that? They’ve started firing at us,” said the Captain. “Watch the flash of their guns. There—that’s another salvo! Well, we shall soon see whether they are making decent shooting or not!”

An unpleasant, chilly business, that; to know to a second the exact interval of time between the appearance of those scintillating stabs of light in the distance and the moment when the salvos would arrive.

During these intervening centuries the *Gemsbok* went scurrying on at top speed over the smooth, dark sea; and a tumbling wake of churned white foam raced after her, piled up and leaping on the after end of the quarter-deck which at that speed settled down low in the water. Scurrying on—not yet towards safety. Safety lay far distant, beyond the gauntlet of the enemy’s fierce fire, through which the *Gemsbok* now had to run like a hare chasing along a hedge lined with guns.

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And then the first salvo arrived. The enemy's range-finding was good, but not quite good enough ; for nearly all the shots fell short, throwing up enormous waterspouts which hung poised between sea and sky and then collapsed slowly and majestically.

Not all of them, however, fell short. There was one that found its mark on one of the *Gemsbok's* gun-shields, where it exploded and tore the gun from its mountings, hurling it across the deck into the sea beyond ; incidentally wiping out the whole of the gun's crew and leaving nothing but a few hideous red relics of sudden death upon the bent and jagged steel deck.

And still the gunnery-lieutenant aloft in the control-top went on monotonously calling out the ranges. Then, a few moments later, came the order to fire.

For, useless and hopeless as it might appear, yet fire from the guns must be maintained. Partly in order to keep up the traditions of the British Navy ; a King's ship, fired at, must fire back and regard neither numbers nor weight of metal ranged against her ; she must school the impertinent ; and even if the rabble drag her down she must to the last speak to them with the voice of Authority.

"We must keep our end up somehow," said the Captain. It meant the same thing, in fewer words.

Also, the order to fire was necessary, because even the best men going could not endure at such a time

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if kept in idleness. For the little cruiser was now being badly mauled.

The day was still, and there was but little breeze to carry away the thick cloud of olive-coloured smoke which hung like a heavy screen in front of the enemy's ship. This lessened, but did not nullify, the effect of the German guns; and were it not for this protective smoke-cloud the *Gemsbok* would probably have been speedily annihilated. As it was, she was hit again and again. Another gun was disabled, and the hull was pierced in many places, happily above the waterline.

And now all the other guns had been silenced. Either they had' been destroyed by direct hits, or else their crews had been killed and maimed. Every minute the ship was being punished more and more heavily. A shell swept through the signal bridge, directly underneath the place where the Captain and Commander were standing. They knew nothing about it, so great was the din and so many the falling shots, until it was required to send a message, when they discovered that the whole of the signalling staff had been killed outright. The funnels were riddled, and the greater part of all the upperworks reduced to matchwood and scrap-iron.

But the ordeal of the gallant little ship was now nearly over. By great good luck her hull had been undamaged in any part of importance, and her steaming powers were as good as ever.

So at last she emerged from that fiery race, torn and battered and short of many a good man; but

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still a ship in being. And she had left the enemy's ships with something to be sorry for on their own account also !

11

There is a well-planned and well-kept "God's Acre" on the island of Hoy in the Orkneys, sacred to those men of the Navy who have laid down their lives in the war.

Scarcely were the graves in that hallowed spot filled in over the bodies of those who fell at Jutland, when a fresh lot had to be dug for the *Hampshire's* men, such of them as were recovered from the sea after the sad disaster to that ship.

It is indeed almost a miracle that anyone should have been saved alive from that disaster. To lower the boats from a sinking ship within the space of a few minutes when there is a fierce gale blowing and a heavy sea running—no one needs now to be told what that leads to, after reading about it so many times in connection with the loss of liner and merchantman. And the coast in those parts offers a poor hospitality to any storm-tossed mariners who may seek to make a landing; the cliffs are the highest in the whole group of islands, rising three or four hundred feet sheer out of the water; so that even if a man were lucky enough to arrive with the life still in him and find a precarious foot-hold at the base of those frowning walls, what chance would he have, sodden with water and half perished with the cold, of scaling those dizzy heights ?

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In the early days of the war, the sailors were provided with swimming-collars for use in such an emergency as the sudden loss of their ship. These collars were of rubber, blown out and then closed by a valve, and were semi-circular in shape, thicker in the middle than at the ends. They were to be worn with the thick part underneath the chin, so as to keep a man's mouth and nose out of the water if he should become unconscious.

However, there was an unsuspected danger in their careless use ; it is said that a number of men owed their deaths and not their lives to these swimming-collars ; jumping into the sea from the height of the ship's deck wearing the collar fully inflated, they reached the water with such an impact that the pressure of the collar suddenly exerted forced their heads back and broke their necks. After a while these collars were abolished, and a more efficient life-saving device substituted.

12

“ What a terribly trying time you must have been through, during these past few months ! ”

I am now reporting a conversation between an officer of our ship and a dear old maiden aunt ; the meeting between them taking place on a subsequent leave.

“ Well, it *was* rather trying, getting him to toe the line. But it all went off wonderfully well, and we enjoyed it immensely.”

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“*Enjoyed it!* But that is how you naval officers always talk! But it must have been very disappointing when they slipped through your fingers and scuttled off?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s the usual thing, isn’t it? We couldn’t very well put them up on board, you know!”

“Of course you couldn’t put the German Fleet up on board—how can you talk such nonsense?”

“Oh, *the German Fleet!* I thought you were talking about Meredyth’s wedding!”

Which shows how events alter their proportions when viewed in the perspective of ship life. The marriage of the Oaf seemed a far more important affair to us than anything else that had taken place.

The bride came up North, for the simple reason that the bridegroom couldn’t go South, there being no leave given for such luxuries as getting married.

Our little Padre wanted badly to have a quarter-deck wedding, which he considered would be most appropriate in war-time; though he could not exactly explain why, when pressed for his reasons.

“But, look here, Bishop,” objected Hotham, who was to be best man, “are you quite sure that a perishing wedding on the quarter-deck is legal? I’m not going to have my man tied up contrary to the King’s Regulations and Admiralty Instructions just to please your nautical fancies! *You* would get unfrocked, of course, but I don’t care a blow about that—it would only be what you deserve—

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but it's the Oaf I'm thinking about, and his Missus, and the——”

Before he could finish his sentence the Oaf stopped him by placing a hand like a leg of mutton over Hotham's face.

“Dry up, you ass,” he said politely.

“And that's all the thanks *I* get,” observed the Captain of Marines when the obliterating hand was removed. But he carried his point after all, and the wedding took place in a church ashore.

So Marjorie Daw became Marjorie Meredyth, and a very sweet bride she looked.

And the very next day we went to sea again. “Hard lines, old man,” I sympathised with the Oaf, “to have a honeymoon of rather less than twenty-four hours !”

We were alone together on deck. “Don't you make any error,” he said with a quite unwonted seriousness ; “*this* honeymoon is going to last all our lives !”

And, though a great many people have made the same remark before, on this occasion I knew it was likely to prove true ; for, you see, Marjorie was—Marjorie ; and Meredyth was—Meredyth.

IV. The Material of the Curtain

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1

ONCE upon a time, in the long ago days before the War, I was standing on the high seawall that overlooks the harbour of Corfu. In the roadstead beneath lay the second flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron, H.M.S. *Venerable*, with the White Ensign at the stern fluttering in the breeze.

It was a sight to arrest anyone's attention ; for the harbour is a beautiful one, sheltered by Goat Island and banked by the blue mountains of Albania ; and beside the natural loveliness of the scene, a man-of-war is always worth looking at under any circumstances.

Others besides myself were evidently of the same opinion. A number of the natives were, as usual, leaning on the railings in happy idleness, but it is doubtful whether these should be reckoned as

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spectators of the scene, since they would probably have scorned the idea of taking the trouble of looking at anything, as being too much like hard work. There was an English gentleman, however, standing next to me, together with his son, a lad of about sixteen. Corfu used to be a favourite resort in those days, and many people came there for their holidays.

Presently the lad broke the silence by the question :

“ Father, what line does that steamer belong to ? ”

“ What steamer ? I don’t see any ! ”

“ Why, that one, down there.” Pointing to H.M.S. *Venerable*.

“ *That !* Why, don’t you know, my boy ? ”

“ No, Father, I don’t.”

“ Well, look at that flag hanging over her stern.”

“ Yes, I’ve been looking at it, but I don’t recognise it. It certainly isn’t the same as the P. and O. boats have.”

“ Do you really mean to say that you don’t know what flag that is ? ”

“ No, Father, I don’t. What is it ? ”

“ Well, that happens to be the White Ensign, and the ship is a battleship of His Majesty’s Navy ! ”

2

It was, perhaps, an exceptionally bad case of the disease of ignorance concerning the Navy ; but that the disease is fairly widespread it would be vain to

deny. One would naturally think that living in an island as we do and depending for our very existence on "Britain's First Line of Defence," there would not be a single boy or girl who could not tell you all about the Navy and describe any class of ship you might care to mention. But, if you do think this, I can only remark that you are allowed another guess.

I don't suppose that anyone in particular is to be blamed for the general lack of information about the ships of the Navy; though perhaps the Navy itself is to a certain extent responsible; it is all very well to boast of being a Silent Navy, and say of its men that "They Do Not Advertise"—but perhaps it would be as well to keep in remembrance the trenchant remark made by a critic of human nature who observed that whereas a silent man usually gets the credit for preternatural wisdom, the truth is, in nine cases out of ten, that he is silent because he has nothing to say; also, that it may be very high-minded and all that sort of thing to refrain from advertising, but a firm run on these lines does not usually succeed in getting much support from the public.

Quae cum ita sint, as Cæsar used so pithily to remark, it may or may not be the case that the modesty of naval men is to be largely held to blame for a good deal of ignorance on the part of people who are simply thirsting for knowledge about ships and sailors. Yet, let the cause lie where it may, there is still room for a propaganda which would probably be greatly welcomed.

At any rate, I can solemnly vouch for the fact that I was once asked by a very severe Rural Deaness, "Have you ever been on a torpedo?"—a question which I had previously imagined to belong to the realms of fiction; and another lady, interrogating me when my ship had just come into port after a voyage of two thousand miles across the ocean, asked, "I suppose, when you do go to sea, you all of you go ashore to sleep every night, don't you?"

But it is not quite fair to laugh; unless one has connections or friends amongst naval men it is not so very easy to get an intimate knowledge of ships and their ways. And now that the war has withdrawn the Fleet so much from its accustomed haunts into places more remote, and has cut short all those amenities which used once to form so enjoyable a link between ship and shore, it is to be feared that a generation will be growing up with little knowledge of the ships of the Fleet beyond that gained from newspapers and books. Well, even book knowledge is better than nothing; and I should like to feel that my pen had helped in adding to the store, even though I cannot hope to rival the graphic powers of a certain Chinaman who described a four-funnelled cruiser as "One large pieceee war-junk, two pieceee bamboo, four pieceee puff-puff, inside walkee no can see."

3

New-comers, arriving at Scapa to join the Fleet, almost without exception remark how deeply

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impressed they are when the drifter brings them round a bend of the land and suddenly reveals the mighty Fleet at its anchorage, so great and overwhelming is the unexpected sight, as if a hand had drawn aside a curtain and revealed in all its majesty of vastness and numbers the Fleet which had gone silently away into the mystery of the North.

Now, the naval man is not easily impressed by sights of majesty and grandeur ; he sees so many examples of it in his many wanderings ; and least of all is he liable to enthuse about the ships, since they are as a rule only too familiar to his eyes. Generally, his one idea is to get away from the very sight of a ship. And a common saying, frequently expressed, is " When I retire, I mean to go ashore with an oar across my shoulder and walk straight on inland till some one asks me, ' What's that thing you're carrying ? ' Then I shall stop at that place and live there for the rest of my life."

So, if the view of the Grand Fleet at anchor is enough to make a hardened old sea-dog take a quick indrawn breath of wonder and admiration, it may be taken for granted that a landsman would not be behindhand in acknowledging the impressiveness of the sight, if it were possible for such an one to visit the harbour of Scapa Flow.

Perhaps the Fleet is seen to the best advantage from the higher land of one of the nearer islands. And the best time to see it is in the evening light of a summer's day ; a day, such as occurs fairly

frequently even in the storm-ridden North, when the sea is glassy-smooth and of a clear light blue like the heavens above it.

In that so clear atmosphere distance seems eliminated ; the nearer ships showing up all their detail just like photographs viewed through a magnifying-glass, and even those farthest away appearing quite distinct in every line and feature. The pale bright light of the sun, still high in the heavens well away to the North of West, pours down upon the Fleet like limelight upon a ballet, emphasising the individual partakers in the *mise-en-scène*, while presenting it as a complete whole to the closely held attention of the onlooker.

The ships lie so still at their anchors, reflected in the mirror of the sea. There is no breeze to enforce its gentle discipline upon the ships and make them all lie head-to-wind in well-drilled regularity of position according to their appointed lines, and in the absence of even "light airs" the minor currents of the Flow make curious play with the heavy monsters, turning them about and leaving them to lie in a strange jumble of positions, no two ships heading in the same direction, so that they look like a company of soldiers who have "fallen out" when they should have been standing to attention and dressed by the left, and even the separate lines are no longer clearly marked, but merge one into another in a manner that makes it difficult for the unpractised eye to determine the line to which a particular ship rightly belongs.

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From the many hundred funnels of the assembled ships, not a wisp of smoke arises; there is no sign that the ships are alive, no motion save that of men seen, like midgets in the distance, working or disporting themselves on the upper deck. And were it not for the fussy little picket-boats crawling between ship and shore or coming alongside with a noisy flurry of reversing screws, a man looking down upon the scene might almost believe himself to be viewing a forgotten and untended fleet of paid-off ships like those which rest in their latter days on the bosom of the Gairloch.

To connect with such a scene any ideas of war seems altogether unreal and impossible. It is a vision of peacefulness, of utter quiet. And it requires a considerable effort of the mind, when looking at this Fleet tucked away here in the far North, to grasp the fact that it is *this*, and nothing else, which keeps the German armies from pouring into England and nullifies all the German plans of world-conquest. These are but ships, numerous certainly but still easily to be counted, powerful but yet liable to many a mischance, a great Fleet but nevertheless dwarfed into insignificance by the surrounding hills of even such an inconsiderable group of tiny islets; but these same ships are, of all the material things which the brain of man has ever devised or the hand of man wrought, the most powerful factor in the world's history. Nothing in so small a compass, or in any compass whatever, in the region of human achievements has ever meant

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so much as this Fleet, the Keeper of the Future, the Pawn of Civilisation. Let but a storm arise mighty enough to scatter and break these vessels, or let the hand of the enemy gather strength and skill to overpower them, and the world would no longer be a good and pleasant place for men to live in, overflowed by an evil tide of corruption and rottenness as when green fields and gardens become covered by a creeping irresistible bog-slide.

4

Of course, the appearance of stillness and inactivity, in the ships at anchor is purely illusionary. In reality, every single vessel of those many hundreds is alive and teeming with latent energy.

There is a tiny fly to be seen in garden or hedgerow which has often reminded me of a man-of-war at rest. It is a little yellow and black fellow, something like a miniature wasp, and I believe its scientific name is *Bombylius*—far too long a name for such a little insect. *Bombylius* is so swift in his flight that the eye cannot follow him. He appears suddenly, as if magically created out of nothing or springing from nowhere, and the first you know of him is that you see him hovering motionless over a flower in front of you, and fixed at a point in mid-air as though held there by some invisible support. But *Bombylius* is really very far from being still; in fact, it is only by putting forth a tremendous amount of energy that he manages to convey the

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impression of being motionless; his tiny wings are working at ever so many thousand beats a minute—as you may find out if you disturb and alarm him, for with a sudden forward tilt of his ailerons he darts away into immediate invisibility.

And the seeming stillness of a ship is only the stillness of a hovering *Bombylius*. So is also the stillness of a fleet at anchor. Given the sudden alarm—as indeed it has been given, many and many a time—and the ship or the Fleet springs to life and motion almost in an instant.

Down below, in that portion of the ship which lies lower than the level of the placid blue water, fires have been kept burning in the furnaces, and men have been labouring that steam may be kept in the boilers, while the watchful eyes of engineers have seen to it that the pointers of the pressure-gauges do not circle back beyond a given point.

It needs but a quietly given order, and the semi-quiescent fires rage their fiercest, the pointer leaps forward on the dial of the gauge, the turning of a valve liberates the pent-up force of imprisoned steam and sends it quickly to the main engines. An unconsidered fraction of this waiting power is sufficient to tear from the sea-bottom those many tons of anchor and cable which had held in place the dead-weight of the great ship against all the fury of wind and wave; and even while an onlooker from the shore is still wondering at the meaning of these flecks of grey-brown smoke appearing from the funnels and hanging in a thin cloud over the

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fleet, the ships have already begun to move, and soon are racing out of harbour like Bombylius disturbed in his hovering.

All this is no fancy picture of what might happen ; it has happened, ever so many times, when we have gone out to pursue our search in the North Sea, reappearing after a greater or less interval in exactly the same spot, precisely as Bombylius does if you wait for him ; and it is happening still—will continue to happen, in fact, until the war is over and the Fleet has spoken the final word.

5

I have no sympathy with those many people who deny that a modern ship can ever be a thing of beauty. These *laudatores temporis acti* invariably drag out a description of the dead-and-gone sailing ship and start to raise a comparison. “ Ah,” they say, shaking their heads, “ those were the days when a ship *was* a ship ! A first-rater under full sail, *that* was a thing of beauty, if you like ! ” And so on, for as long as they can find a listener.

All of these laudatory remarks are, no doubt, perfectly true ; a man-of-war of Nelson’s days, and for the fifty succeeding years in which the type survived, was certainly a very beautiful object ; but to deny any beauty on this account to a modern ship of war is just about as sensible as to say that a motor-car must necessarily be ugly because it doesn’t happen to be a stage-coach.

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These amateur Ruskins who affect to see nothing to please the eye in modernity would do well to study Saint Augustine's treatise on "The Beautiful and the Fit,"—only, unfortunately, that celebrated Father of the Church never got any further than merely intending to write it; but as it is now too late to hope for any fulfilment of the Saint's good intentions, one may at least be permitted to make a guess at the general theme of his contemplated treatise. He probably meant to say that a thing can properly be termed Beautiful when it is obviously and unmistakably seen to be suited to the purpose for which it is made; and when also it harmonises with its environment.

Nothing would please me more than to spread myself a bit in the elaboration of this theme; as for example, to point out that if you were to see a lady in a ball dress following the guns on a grouse moor, your very pity for her inability to see that she was spoiling the picture would cause you to stamp her into the heather with your thick nailed boots; but seeing that I am discoursing of ships and not of ladies or grouse moors, I will go no further in supplying the deficiencies of Saint Augustine than merely to point out that a modern ship fulfils both the necessary qualifications of beauty.

See how completely a monster battleship suggests Power, or a destroyer Speed. Any one who had never seen the sea before could tell at the first glance that the little wasp-like craft was never meant to be the protagonist in a sea-fight, and that the great

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floating fortress was not specially designed to get through the water quickly. Both types, and indeed all other types of modern ships of war, do in point of fact look precisely adapted to their individual purposes.

The beauty of the old sailing-ship was the beauty of Gracefulness; that of the modern battleship is the beauty of Majesty. Each is perfect in its way, but they are different ways, with much the same relation to each other as the beauty of woman has to the beauty of man; and, ungallant though it may be, the opinion of artistic critics inclines to give the pre-eminence for beauty to the male.

So on this count the modern vessel of steam and steel may justly claim a title to beauty, not only as great as that of the lovely old tower of timber and white canvas, but even greater still.

And as for harmony with environment, who could ever look at a modern ship whether at anchor or under way without being struck with the wonderful manner in which it blends with the sea and the land, so much so that something seems wanting in the natural scene on the departure of this product of the noisy grimy shipbuilding yards?

The very colour, grey with a tinge of blue, which marks our ships and is so scornfully compared with the black and yellow and red of a previous age, is one which mingles harmoniously with every possible kind of scene, and looks well in every kind of light; it is a neutral tint, clashing with nothing; the colour of deep shadows, without which no

picture is complete. It was chosen, of course, for warlike purposes, as an attempt towards invisibility ; but if a committee of artists had been ordered to select a colour merely for the purpose of making a ship a thing of beauty, it is morally certain that this colour and no other is the very one they would have chosen.

And if anybody, scenting boredom in the above remarks, and skilled in skipping, has arrived at this point without being convinced that a modern ship is one of the most beautiful objects in the world—well, anyhow, *I* think it is so ; and it is no use giving me any of your back answers !

6

The interior of a modern man-of-war is a mystery to most of those who have no personal experience of it. I have met people who have expressed a mild surprise on learning that we do not run to swimming-baths and tennis courts like the giant Atlantic liners ; and even the concise explanation that these ships are built for fighting, not for pleasure, has left them only silenced, not convinced ; they still “ can’t quite see why.”

In a passenger ship the internal economy is quite simple and easy to understand, differing very little in the largest or the smallest of the type ; there are corridors with cabins running nearly the whole length of the vessel and enclosing a central engine-

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room, with saloons aft and accommodation for the crew forward.

But in a man-of-war things are much more complicated than this. The biggest battleship is hardly more than six hundred feet long—quite small in comparison with the *Olympic* or the *Imperator*—yet its interior is cut up into innumerable compartments, like a chunk of honeycomb. A new arrival on board always loses himself at frequent intervals for the first two or three days, and it takes him weeks before he can say with confidence that he can properly find his way about all over the ship. Even then he only means those parts of the ship to which his own particular duties call him, there still remain many compartments of considerable size, approachable only by manholes, where few besides the carpenter and his staff ever penetrate.

The similarity of arrangement to that of a honeycomb is made more complete by steel partitions running from side to side of the ship, transverse bulkheads as they are called, pierced by doors which can be closed hermetically. The object of these is to render the ship like a lifeboat, capable of floating even if pierced in one or more compartments. Even the hatchways on the upper deck, the entrances by which one approaches from the outer world to this rabbit-warren, are made to be closed in like fashion, so that even supposing a ship were full of water right up to her main deck—the deck next below the upper one of all—she would still remain afloat.

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There are diagrams in a well-known book on ship-construction which prove that when the *Victoria*, Sir George Tryon's flagship, was rammed and sunk years ago in the Mediterranean she ought, at least theoretically, to have kept floating if her watertight doors had not been damaged in the collision.

A ship does not go to sea for even a few hours without the watertight doors being carefully inspected and closed. And on such occasions, if one desires to get from one part of the ship to another it is necessary to climb up on deck into the outer air and then dive down another rabbit-hole leading to the required destination, frequently being obliged to negotiate on the way a manhole or two which though kept closed can be opened if necessary and must be shut again immediately afterwards.

Much space is taken up by the magazines. Amateur experts sometimes amuse themselves by designing a ship to carry about twice the number of guns generally considered sufficient ; they forget that a gun is not much use without ammunition, and that you cannot very well carry ammunition unless you have some place to keep it in.

When you consider that each shell of the biggest guns is about five feet long and weighs somewhere near a ton, you can see that it requires a good deal of space to carry sufficient rounds to enable the eight or ten guns to keep firing for an hour or so. Even this does not take into account the space needed for the cartridges to propel the shells, or the shells and cartridges for the smaller guns which

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may number anything between twenty and fifty. In fact, when you come to think of it, it is a wonder that there is room left in the ship for any other purpose when the magazines have been allocated.

Yet there has still to be found space for about a thousand men to live in decency and comfort ; for stores and provisions enough to last them several weeks ; for fuel sufficient to carry the ship thousands of miles without replenishing ; and, lastly, for those very important things, the engines and boilers.

Now, these latter form one of the main distinctions between a man-of-war and a merchant ship or passenger liner. The tramp steamer is content to jog along at nine knots and consequently does not require very large engines ; the great liner demands far more engine-room space to enable her to go her twenty-five knots, but then she can easily afford this space, being so large and having only passenger accommodation to consider. But the man-of-war that wishes to steam at twenty-five knots has a tremendous weight to carry in addition to her crew—the guns and ammunition mentioned above, for instance, and the massive armour on her sides—and, as a result, the engines and furnaces occupy a space very much larger in proportion to her size than is the case in vessels of an unwarlike type.

Roughly, then, the engine- and boiler-rooms run to about two thirds of a ship's length ; on either side, immediately beneath the upper deck, are two

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comparatively narrow decks, one above the other, where the men live, taking their meals at movable tables and benches and at night slinging their hammocks to hooks in the deck overhead. These living-spaces are all walled in, on the outboard side, by thick armour, as also are most of the officers' cabins, and as the armour cannot be pierced for windows without defeating its object there is consequently no daylight, but only the light provided by electric lamps; this rule holds good everywhere throughout the ship except at the "soft-ends," that is to say the extreme bow and stern of the vessel where there is no armour for the reason that there is nothing inside at these parts of vital importance to the safety of the ship.

A ship of war is, then, a compromise between weight and speed—and, it may be added, comfort. The vessel has yet to be designed which can go as fast as the engineers would like, carry as many guns as the gunnery-lieutenant would like, be as strongly protected as everybody on board would like, and still leave room for a skittle-alley and separate cabins for all the bluejackets. The marvel is that we have really approached so nearly to this ideal that even the enthusiasts in every department can find very little occasion for grumbling.

Even the armour itself is the result of a compromise. This, which by the way does not form an integral portion of the original structure, but is stuck on like postage-stamps afterwards in large slabs, has been the subject of discussion between

two opposite schools. One set of experts held that a ship should be protected by armour as thick as possible, and as much of it as could be spread over the ship's sides. The other set held that it was much safer to have no armour at all, as in this case a shell would enter at one side and go out at the other without doing any damage worth speaking about ; and, to a certain extent, this opinion has been justified by experience, since a shell has been known to pierce an armoured ship without exploding till it met the armour on the other side which prevented it escaping. The old cruisers of the *Niobe* and *Diadem* classes were built according to this theory, but modern opinion appears sound in its belief that whereas armour may actually be a danger in one particular case, it is much more likely to make for safety in fifty other cases.

One thing, however, appears to have escaped the attention of pro-armour men ; or, if they did notice it, they did not see their way to meeting the difficulty. And that is, that when shells are fired from a very long distance they fall almost perpendicularly and are just as likely to hit the upper deck as the ship's side. Therefore, in order to obtain complete protection, the flat upper deck ought to be armoured as thickly as the sides.

Even if this were done, the protection would not yet be absolute ; a case has been known, I believe, where a shell has fallen short, burrowed down into the water, and risen again in an upward curve to

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meet the bottom of a ship which it pierced, exploding and sinking the vessel. The case is not thoroughly authenticated—it could scarcely be, under the circumstances—but there is no convincing reason why it should not happen.

Thorough protection against gunfire will therefore require that the ship should be encased top, bottom and sides by thick armour. But as this would not leave room for engines powerful enough to drive such a weight through the water, let alone for anything else, the matter rests at the same stage as most other human affairs, namely that you can't have it every way, and so must be content with what you *can* have.

7

Having regard to the various types of ships, those of one nation are not greatly different in general design and arrangements from those of any other. There are, naturally, certain minor differences, for the most part the result of each nation making its own experiments; as for example the trellis masts of some of the American battleships, or three-gun turrets, or something designed expressly differing from the normal for some definite purpose, as in the German cruisers where the guns are so arranged as to direct the greatest mass of fire right aft in order to fight a retreating action—and a nice feeling of confidence it must surely give the German sailors to feel that their ships are specially built for running away!

Except for such details, all ships of one class tend to become alike all over the world ; and it is pretty certain that if there were battleships in the canals of Mars they would be found, if we could see them, to be not greatly unlike the battleships of Great Britain or Japan. Just as the clock invented independently in China has no essential differences from the clock invented by Europeans. The thing becomes what it is by the process of evolution, and could not possibly be anything else.

Now when you are able to say this about a thing, it amounts to saying that it is perfectly suited to the purpose for which it is designed ; and this is one of the chief glories of a ship of war, distinguishing it very markedly from constructive work on land, where it is difficult to find a dwelling-house really fit to live in, or a palace where a king can do his reigning in anything like comfort, or a public-house whose interior appointments add anything to the pleasure of drinking beer.

But a battleship manages to combine with extraordinary success the two widely different functions of a fighting-machine and a home ; and, in addition, throws in as a makeweight the faculty of transporting its inhabitants from place to place with all the ease and comfort of a magic carpet. I don't think that any one human invention could fairly be expected to do more than this ; and the nearest approach to such a complication of perfections that I can think of in the realms of nature is the terrestrial globe itself—and even this is a bad second, because

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it cannot engage in a scrap with another planet without fatal results to the whole of its ship's company.

8

One frequently hears the expression that So-and-So is in "the very latest type of battleship." But to speak with absolute precision there is never any such thing existing as a ship of the very latest type; no sooner is a ship commissioned than she at once begins to become obsolete, because there is certain to be another ship of an improved type well advanced in the process of building. In fact, this latter ship may herself be superseded, long before ever she feels the water, by yet another vessel just commenced on the building-stocks. New types of ships follow one another like flowers on a hollyhock stem, and there is always a new bud to replace the full-blown bloom.

This in no way contradicts the statement that a man-of-war is the evolution of a perfect type; the evolution is still going on, and new conditions are continually arising which call for new forms and methods.

The average life of a battleship is somewhere about fifteen years. After this her usefulness is by no means finished, but she is no longer fit to take her place in the first line; alterations and improvements in new types, slight and not very noticeable in their successive advances, have accumulated at the end of this period to such an extent that the

latest ship afloat is entirely different from the old vessel. Even the change from sails to steam, though a swift change, was nevertheless a gradual one, accomplished by several intermediate stages ; and the only instance in the whole history of naval shipbuilding where a great change of type was suddenly effected was the building of the famous *Dreadnought*, which in one immediate act made obsolete all the ships of all the navies of the world. Even the *Dreadnought* herself is now almost to be termed obsolete, so many have been the gradual small changes made since she was launched.

I can never quite get over the wonderment of realising that every detail amongst all the millions in the construction of a ship is clearly defined in the minds of her designers and marked down on paper before ever the building is begun. It seems to me far more natural that very much of the work, and certainly all the minute details should be thought out and worked into the broad design as the work went along ; that one of the constructors should, for example, take a look at a compartment nearly completed, and observe, " Better put a couple of ringbolts in the deck here, they'll be needed for the jiggers working that armoured hatch ; and while you're about it, there don't seem to me to be quite enough rivets in that scarf-plate over the beam in that corner—but it all depends what weight we put on the deck above," and so on. But that every single eyebolt, screw-hole, hook, and minutiae of every imaginable kind should have a pre-incarnate

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existence on the blue paper in the draughting office, this has always appeared to me to partake of the superhuman, the magical.

And although the ship makes her first appearance complete in every carefully thought out detail, like the lady and gentleman who sprang full-grown from the head of Jupiter, yet it is equally true that she is never finished building, and in many cases a ship is scarcely recognisable at the end of two or three commissions as the same vessel.

This process of change can take different forms. In one ship which I once commissioned, the Commander took a strong dislike to any fitting which he considered unnecessary; and in consequence the Indian Ocean was strewn from Gardafui to Bombay with an assortment of metal of various shapes and sizes which had been carefully and expensively designed by the builders of the ship.

As a rule, however, the reverse process takes place, and at each successive docking something is added until the result is something like an Elizabethan mansion after it has been a few years in the possession of a wealthy soap-boiler.

When a ship is first built everything that is built into her or placed on board is weighed with scrupulous care, and a record taken. Sometimes this is carried to an extreme length, as when a destroyer officer of my acquaintance was forbidden to take on board an addition to his private gear weighing ten pounds; it would be exceeding the amount provided for by the constructors, it was said. Two

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more guns were added to this destroyer afterwards, together with several other things, amounting in all to about a hundred tons ; but the constructors' ideas of weights allowed on board were not now quoted as laws of the Medes and Persians.

9

In spite of the many and widely differing functions which a battleship is called upon to perform, such as firing guns and steaming, she remains nevertheless a single instrument, a complete entity having divers component parts, and considered as such she is as delicate an instrument as a chronometer and needs as constant keeping in working order.

This is not merely an affair of cleaning. Though cleanliness is essential to a ship and is maintained to such an extent as to have become proverbial. Scarcely a square inch on deck or below that is not scrubbed and swept and swabbed daily, sometimes several times a day ; such bright work as has been allowed to remain in war time is kept constantly polished ; and the painter's staff, busy as they always are, find themselves reinforced by practically the whole ship's company every few weeks when the order, " Hands paint ship " is the prelude to a thorough spring cleaning and renewal of all painted surfaces both inside and outside.

These little activities, however disturbing to one's comfort, are taken for granted as part of the ordinary and necessary routine. A more important

phase of naval charring is the cleaning of the ship's bottom, which must be done in dry dock from time to time. Even the best anti-fouling composition must deteriorate or become worn away in time ; and it is astonishing how soon a growth of weed can accumulate on the bottom of a ship, sufficient to reduce her speed to a very appreciable extent.

Cleaning, however, is only a minor part of the constant care that must be taken in keeping the delicate instrument fit for service. There are strains and stresses to which every part of the ship is subjected, both by the force of the waves and by her own motion as she is pushed through the water, the whole two hundred yards of her, by a power applied at one single point astern ; there are torsions and disturbances, as she is dragged around in altering course or when a broadside of heavy guns is fired. All such occurrences are liable to set up derangements which must be measured with meticulous care and readjusted even at the cost of infinite labour ; because even very minute deflections from the true may become magnified by their effects into the greatest mischances. An error of less than a degree in the pointing of a gun, for example, may mean a good many yards of inaccuracy in the fall of shot at long ranges ; and a very slight bend in a length of shafting can lead to anything from a hot bearing to a complete breakdown ; and when the adjustments of a turbine are made to a thousandth of an inch, it will easily be understood that a moment's relaxation of the necessary care can lead to the

disaster known as "stripping a turbine" which can lay a ship up and render her useless for weeks on end.

These be but bare facts, not very interesting perhaps in themselves; but consider what they mean, when you know that the Fleet has been kept up to the highest state of efficiency all through these four years of war! In peace time, to keep these delicate instruments in working order was almost the main occupation of the Navy; now, it has had to be carried on as a side-show, at odd times and to a large extent unaided, without interrupting the grimmer business of war.

Incidentally, a little reflection on this constant duty of caring for a ship may serve to answer the question, so frequently put, "What on earth can all those men find to do with themselves on board?"

10

Ships have no identity in the sense that regiments have. The officers and men leave after two or three years and go to another ship; and even the ships themselves have but a comparatively brief life, and then their names disappear from the Navy List. Hence it is that whereas a man who chooses a military career belongs to his regiment rather than to the Army, his naval brother belongs to the Navy rather than to his ship. If you happen to find yourself in a portrait gallery, and your curiosity prompts you to enquire who was that fiery looking gentleman

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with the side-whiskers in the tightly buttoned scarlet tunic and stock, you are told that he was a captain in the Twenty-second, or the Berkshires, or the Artillery, as the case may be ; but the blue-coated gent in the frame beside him is only given the general description of " a captain in the Navy," without particularising the ships in which he spent his career.

True, there is an attempt made to foster a continuity of a sort by reviving ships' names of bygone days. The revival does not appear to be conducted on any definite system ; we have some ships at the present time whose names have been in abeyance since the days of the Tudors ; and, on the other hand, there are many cases where no sooner has a ship been broken up than a new one has appropriated her name. The silver plate, trophies and presentations, of a paid-off ship are usually stored at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, and in course of time handed over to the new ship which may chance to be christened by the same name. Many a mess is adorned with articles inscribed " Presented to the officers of H.M.S. ——— by "—then follows the donor's name ; you look at it musingly and remark to yourself, " Funny, I can't remember that name ; when was he in the ship ? " Till a closer glance reveals the date, and you realise that the giver must have been dead and gone these many years, or at the best must be living comfortably in retirement and old age, busily engaged in heaping verbal scorn upon the present-

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day Navy and comparing it with the days when he left the old So-and-so, "and by gad, sir, a deuced fine ship she was, and as fine a set of messmates as ever commissioned one of Her Majesty's ships!" And it comes home to you that it was not really *your* ship to which was presented the silver bowl, or the candelabra, or the presidential hammer but a half-forgotten vessel of the times when ships were called "ironclads," or even an earlier craft dating back to the days of "auxiliary steam," when the towering white sails were still reckoned the only really reliable means of propulsion, and the "royal-yardsman" was the pride and envy of the ship's company.

Such links with the past are no more than weak and occasional; and the sort of tradition which is so intensely valuable in the Army, where a man's forebears have served in the old regiment for four or five generations can have no counterpart in respect of any one particular ship.

Even the crests of naval ships have no tradition attached to them, and no official recognition. The only naval crests having the sanction of authority are the "Foul Anchor" and the naval crown—and even this latter has lately been handed over by the Admiralty to become the badge of the Mercantile Marine.

Neither of these devices has ever been the individual property of any one particular ship, but common to the Navy at large; and this I am sure must have been felt a hardship to many sweethearts

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and wives of sailors who have looked with envy at the soldiers' girls proudly adorned with the regimental crest in cunning work of the goldsmith or the travail of their own broidering-needle; while the sailor's girl is unable to don any adornment to show what ship her Jack belongs to. Admiralty please note, and give the Heralds' College a job to devise proper crests for one and all of His Majesty's Ships of War.

While they are about it, these heraldic experts might as well invent appropriate mottoes to accompany the crests. Amateur efforts in this direction are not always thoroughly satisfactory.

A case in point is a certain ship which was very proud of its motto, a real Latin one; the imposing legend was displayed in every possible place in the ship, carved, painted, or gilded with many elaborate scrolls and flourishes.

I am not going to give away the full motto, but in it occurred the word "*Fiduciæ*"; now, in several out of the many presentments of it, this particular word was written "*Fiducia*." The Chaplain, who was keen about such matters, was greatly worried over this variant reading which entailed an important change of meaning in the motto. After much cogitation, being unable to arrive at any definite conclusion, he finally decided to consult the Heralds' College on the point. The obliging specialists sent him reams of stuff about it, with the sole result of still further complicating the matter.

Just then a Chief Gunner, who had formerly

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been in the ship, rejoined her after an absence of a few years. And the Chaplain, not wishing to let slip any chance of information about the motto, asked him, as one who remembered the ship's past history, if he could throw any light upon the origin of the famous motto.

"Why, bless 'ee, sir," said the Chief Gunner, "I made up that motto! The Commander says to me one night, 'Mr. Dispart, I want you to make up some sort of a motto for this ship; we had one in my last ship, a real fine one with long Latin words in it, and it was much admired, and I'm dashed if I'm going to come to a ship without a motto at all, so please look slippy and make one up.' Well, I borrowed a Latin dictionary and got to work; but I couldn't find anything about torpedoes in it—the Commander was a torpedoman, so I wanted to get the right side of him; but in the end I knocked together something that seemed to meet the case, and reported to the Commander that I had done so. 'That's all right,' he says, 'and tell the painter to splash it about over the ship and I'll come and see what it looks like when he's finished.' Well, though I says it myself, that motto looked a first-class article when Putty had put it into Gothic characters; but *you* know what Commanders are—they must make out they know more than anybody else, and never let on when they don't know nothing at all; ours just cocked an eye at my Latin words, and said, 'I don't quite like the look of that; too many E's about it—take some of 'em out.' And that's why

you find *Fiduciæ* in some places and *Fiducia* in others ! ”

11

Although there is no continuity attaching to ships, of the kind that gives rise to traditions and legends there is yet, for all that, another sort of continuity of a very unique sort. I suppose there is hardly any human contrivance older than a ship ; when primeval man first took to digging for himself a cave in the hillside for shelter he had probably been accustomed for many generations to sitting astride a log and propelling it with hands and feet in order to cross a stream ; ships must be older even than houses. Yet there is nothing that has changed so little. In spite of modern scientific improvements and developments, a ship remains to all intents and purposes nothing more than a hollowed-out log from which you throw stones at the enemy.

One very often hears the question propounded. “ What would Nelson do, supposing he were to come to life again and find himself on board a modern battleship ? ” The answer is not very difficult to guess ; he would require perhaps a week or two in order to make himself acquainted with the advances made since his day, and then he would be just as much at home as he was in the old *Victory*. Before anything else, the first object in the design and construction of a ship is to enable her to withstand the force of the wind and the waves ; and

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these remain the same as they were at the beginning of things.

That is why, on stepping on board the most ultra-modern ship that floats, one is immediately transported back to the days of the primal adventurer who put to sea before history was written, and becomes a contemporary of all sailors throughout all the centuries.

And perhaps this explains—at any rate it pleases me to advance the theory—why sailors as a class are simple-minded and simple-hearted folk; it is the ship that moulds them gently into the form and fashion of bygone times, when seafaring men reckoned the elements their worst foes, and when all their loves and hates were equally elemental and open.

Rocks and reefs are feared as much by the navigator who guides his thirty thousand tons of steel as they were by the helmsman of the frail craft in which Ulysses sailed. An appointment to the very latest battleship or cruiser means the same rending of home-ties as was felt by the sailors who manned King Alfred's Fleet. The last sight of the coast of Britain from the deck is still able to give a heart-ache not different from that felt by the men who sailed in the *Mayflower*. And, when the crash of battle comes, there is little besides the substitution of gun for catapult to differentiate the fray from the battling onslaught of Roman and Punic galleys.

Such things form innumerable links with all the

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past, and make the trade of the seaman—especially the fighting seaman—a thing that is as old as the centuries and as new as yesterday. The “great handsome lofty vessel, with sails of comely canvas and new apparatus,” in which Sindbad embarked on his adventurous voyaging, and the “ship of about one hundred and twenty ton burden, carrying six guns and fourteen men besides the master and his boy,” from the wreck of which Robinson Crusoe escaped to his wonderful island, were both of them so similar to a modern Super-Dreadnought in all essentials that a seaman of to-day might be translated back to either, and in half-an-hour feel himself thoroughly at home.

Herein lies the real continuity of ship life, a far greater thing than any mere regimental tradition, making for brotherhood between all who, in the merchant-sailor’s phrase, “use the sea.”

12

Just as a single ship has a character and personality of its own so also has a fleet. Directly a number of ships are congregated into a fleet, a completely new entity is formed, as a chain becomes a thing entirely different from the links of which it is composed.

A cargo boat or passenger vessel is always alone and on its own; a man-of-war, and especially a battleship, scarcely ever. A battleship operating singly would be about as much use as a single

piece on a chessboard ; at sea, she takes her appointed place with the others of her particular squadron, and the squadron fills just one part of the line of the whole fleet ; and everything that is done on board has to be considered in the light of the fleet's needs, the ship's personality being subordinated to that of the squadron, and the squadron's to that of the fleet.

Now this constitutes one of the greatest factors of naval life, a factor which can hardly be appreciated by friends from the shore who come on board to visit a ship without a thought of the squadron in which that ship forms but a single unit. Yet the fact of being a part of a fleet has an enormous influence upon the life of a ship, with all those untold advantages of team-work which make cricket and football superior as games to the individualistic golf or tennis.

The ideal fleet must be something more than a mere collection of ships ; each separate squadron, if not the whole assemblage of squadrons, should be formed of ships of the same class, with the same steaming capabilities and turning circles for manœuvring and the same number and calibre of guns for concentration of fire.

The less a fleet approximates to this ideal the more difficult it becomes to handle it efficiently, and although a certain degrees of divergence may be allowed, there comes a point when a ship or squadron of a different class can become a positive hindrance and even a danger to the others.

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Happily, the Grand Fleet and its component squadrons fulfil these desired conditions more perfectly than has ever been known before since modern fleets were invented, and it is this fact just as much as the Grand Fleet's numerical superiority which makes it such a trustworthy Curtain of Safety.

Perhaps the consciousness of belonging to the most magnificent fleet of fighting ships the world has ever seen may possibly make its members assume an air of pride just the least bit irritating to those others who have done their job equally well elsewhere; I would be the last to deny it, having listened to various remarks which I refrain from quoting about "You fellows in the Grand Fleet"; but after all, it is largely a matter of luck whether one happens to be sent to this or that billet, and one has a right to be proud of one's good luck, so long as it is recognised as luck and not mistaken for merit.

And, certainly, the Grand Fleet *is* something to be proud of. I fancy that in the yet far distant years, when the midshipmen and ship's boys of to-day are turned to garrulous old greybeards delighting to indulge in a chin-wag with other old cronies about past days; when one talks of his ship, and another becomes reminiscent concerning his favourite foreign station, and all try to outvie one another in the recital of their old experiences; the proudest ancient of them all will be he who can straighten his bowed head and stick out his sunken chest with the crowning boast:

"But *I* was in the Grand Fleet!"

V. The Curtain Raised

V. The Curtain Raised

1

HOTHAM had a brother who had been in France from the very beginning of the war and had come through the hottest fighting without so much as a scratch. After two full years of immunity, however, he came in for what was a good deal worse than a wound, namely, a pretty bad attack of shellshock and was invalided home. He spent some months in hospital, advancing from the worst stage of complete loss of memory with concomitant horrors, through the convalescent conditions during which he was in a sanatorium, to the final stage of recovery, or at least of sufficient recovery to enable him to go home.

Then he wrote to his brother in our ship suggesting that he would like to spend a week or two on board us if such a thing could be arranged.

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There was not the slightest difficulty in fixing the matter up, and in due course he came.

We found him a very pleasant fellow, not unlike his brother in appearance but very dissimilar in manner, as he was distinctly quiet, and his conversation was not garnished with the decorative verbiage of our Marine Officer. He quickly made himself at home and settled down to ship life, and except for a little jumpiness at sudden noises and a very slight tendency to lose his grasp of a prolonged conversation he seemed to be perfectly fit again. He took part eagerly in everything that went on in the line of our mild amusements, and showed the keenest interest in picking up all the knowledge he could about ship life and Navy ways. When he had been a few days on board, he heard that the ship was due to go to sea on the morrow to do a big-gun shoot, and he was quite excited at the prospect of witnessing it.

"What about your ruddy nerves, old chap?" his brother asked. "Those flaming guns make Gehenna's own noise, you know. Hadn't you better go to the beach till we come back? The parson or somebody will keep you company, I daresay."

But the other Hotham said that he wouldn't miss the firing for anything, and was quite sure it wouldn't hurt him.

We all felt a little anxious about it, and were very glad indeed to find that he was not at all upset or ill when the firing was completed. In

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fact, at dinner he quite bucked up and was very cheery, so it seemed that the experience had actually done him good instead of harm.

Then soon after dinner the mail arrived, and that of course absorbed all our interest for the time. Our visitor had a letter, which he pored over in silence, and when he had finished it he put it away in his pocket and became very quiet. We noticed this, and were afraid he had received some upsetting news, but naturally did not care to ask him. Presently he went to his cabin.

A couple of hours later, when I went to turn in, I passed his door on my way to my own cabin, and seeing a light still shining through the door-curtain I just looked in to say good-night. He was busily writing, but looked up as I poked my head in.

"Not turned in yet? High time you were in beddie-bye," I admonished him.

"I'm just going," he returned, "but I have an important letter I must finish first."

Taking the hint, I shoved off and left him.

The next morning he looked pretty seedy, I thought, there were dark hollows under his eyes, and he had the appearance of not having slept all night.

"Feeling quite fit this morning? No bad effects from the firing yesterday?" It was a fairly tactless query on my part, but I spoke without thinking. However, he assured me that he felt as fit as a fiddle, and had thoroughly enjoyed the shoot.

"But I'm fearfully worried, all the same," he continued, "and I don't know what to do about

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it. *Something* must be done, and pretty quickly, too ! ”

“ Anything I can help in ? ”

“ It would be awfully good of you if only you would ! You—and the Padre. Would you mind, both of you, coming to my cabin ? But not a word to my brother. This must be kept from him at all costs ! ”

I went and collected the Padre, greatly wondering what our help was needed for. And the three of us assembled in our visitor’s cabin.

He shut the door carefully, and pulled out a letter from an inside pocket.

“ You saw, perhaps, that I got a letter by the mail that came last night ? ”

“ Yes, I noticed you reading one.”

“ This is it. It is from a pal of mine in Ipswich, a chap who was too old to join up, so he went in for home defence—the V.T.C.’s you know. Read it, will you ? ”

This was the letter :

2

“ MY DEAR HOTHAM,—I doubt if this ever reaches you, but I am sending it first by a friend to the other side of England where he will post it, so it may just have a chance.

“ There is terrible news. The Germans have landed, and hell is let loose.

“ My brain is all in a whirl, and I can hardly

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write coherently. I must tell you the facts just as they come into my mind.

“There are about seventy thousand of them. Some of them who have been taken prisoners state that more will arrive in a day or two. People are saying this is impossible. Well, they said it was impossible that any Germans could ever effect a landing—but here they are!

“They are entrenched at present. Rumour says that we are scraping troops together to attack them, and they, I suppose, are waiting for reinforcements. Not a word of this has been allowed to get into the papers, and you won’t see it in your wireless news. As Parliament is not sitting no awkward questions will be asked. We are going on our old ostrich policy of pretending nothing is happening, but, of course, everybody knows—though they don’t know *all*!

“They came at night. There were eight liners of the largest class, packed stiff with men. The ships were run up on the beach at full speed, and the troops were cleared out of them within two hours. The coastguards and watchers were at their posts all night, and would have reported the affair, but the Germans had taken precautions. You know they had plenty of their kin in England to help them; all the wires were cut, and the coast watchers were probably murdered long before the transports arrived.

“They brought no guns with them, only machine-guns—and plenty of these, with ammunition

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enough and to spare, as we have found out to our cost. But now they have artillery also. How? By capturing a large ordnance factory and a munition-works. Our experts said an invasion was out of the question on account of this very thing, the difficulty of bringing over a sufficient number of heavy guns. The Germans solved this difficulty by not bringing any; they took ours instead. We never thought of that!

“The first news was from a village ten miles inland (I mustn’t mention any names, but perhaps you can guess).

“A lad came riding in on his bicycle at three in the morning, and roused the place by his shouting. He had been shot in the neck and the side, and God only knows how he had endured to ride so far. He died an hour later from exhaustion and loss of blood, but not before he had had time to tell his news.

“The Germans, he said, had made a cordon round the nearest villages immediately on landing, and then closing in silently had killed every single inhabitant, man, woman and child, to prevent the news being spread. The lad believed he was the only one who had managed to escape, and even he was shot at in getting away.

“That, as I have told you, was the first we heard of it. Within an hour the roads were black with people clearing out of the towns and villages, going westwards, north and south. I cannot write of all the misery of it—but I begin to realise

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now what it must have been like in France and Belgium. We used to read of these things, and felt a mild thrill of horror, but I don't believe any one of us ever took it in properly—it was all so far away. Now we know !

“ They were not allowed to go very far. The business had to be hushed up, I suppose. Trains were rushed along to pick up the people and carry them off to certain centres where they have been billeted, and a barrier of soldiers and special constables has been set up encircling all this district ; no one is allowed to come further inland, and no one can get in within the ring.

“ Not all the refugees could get away by the trains. The roads were still full of those who could not get places in the cars and trucks—and the Germans advanced along the roads behind them and fired into the crowds with machine-guns. Out of pure wanton devilry, it seems, for they did not attempt to follow up the pursuit, but waited till the roads were clear.

“ Hundreds were killed in this way. But this was nothing to the other horrors we have since heard of. Let me try and tell you in proper order how things happened. By seven in the morning the Germans had advanced in five columns, fan-wise, getting as far as eight miles inland at the farthest point from their landing. There they spread their line into the form of a rough semi-circle, taking in the towns of — and —, and several villages.

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“Troops detailed for the purpose immediately rounded up all the inhabitants of these places, and drove them into the open fields. There was no chance of resistance. They had large placards prepared beforehand, printed in English, to the effect that any attempt on the part of civilians to fire on German troops would be met by instant reprisals of the severest possible nature; and certain English-speaking men were sent into the streets to proclaim the same by word of mouth.

“This order was obeyed, generally. People knew what disregard of it had led to in Belgium. But in the village of —— there was an old man, half-crazy, whose two sons had been starved and kicked to death in a German prison. He, before anyone could stop him, or even guessed what he was about, went out into the village street with a shot-gun and fired at the German who had just made the proclamation. He could not even shoot straight—frenzied mind and palsied arm—unhappy old man! The German was only wounded in the shoulder. Within ten minutes there was a cordon of soldiers around that village and every house was ablaze. Those who tried to escape by the streets or through the hedges were thrust back at the point of the bayonet into the flames—not even the mercy of cold steel was granted them.

“My God! To think of it! I have to put down my pen before I can go on. The horror of it all is too much for me!

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“ But that was not the worst. A more terrible deed of unspeakable treachery and savagery soon followed.

“ The inhabitants of the captured towns, who had been mustered in the open fields, were divided into three lots ; the able-bodied men, the young women, and all the rest. Of these, the men were first marched off, and forced to help in digging trenches. Very many of them, I am glad to say, refused flatly, and they were bayonetted outright, before the eyes of all the other people. Seeing this, the waverers and some of those who had less moral courage, began sullenly to obey their captors. It is easy to blame them—but, after all, I might have done the same myself in their place ; life is sweet, and there was just a chance of escape. Besides, their womenfolk, at the sight of the bayonetting of those who refused, screamed and cried to the remainder, begging them to give in and do as they were told.

“ There were, I know, some of the women brave enough to call out to the men to refuse ; but these cries were swamped by the general screaming, and only served to add to its force. So, many of the men shouldered the entrenching tools supplied to them, and marched away under guard.

“ And then, when they were well out of sight, the German devils separated the young women and girls from the other group and made them look on while the third lot, the old people, matrons,

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and children, were deliberately massacred by machine-guns.

“ Even some of the German soldiers, I am told, found this too much for them, and were sick, physically sick, where they stood hemming in the two crowds. And one German officer is reported to have said that he regretted this apparent cruelty, but it was a military necessity, as they could not afford to feed so many useless mouths.

“ I have kept the worst of this particular horror to the last. Perhaps you can guess it. The girls and young women were all marched off to the main camp of the German soldiers. Oh, my God, wilt Thou not be avenged on such a nation as this ?

“ Of the men who were taken away to dig trenches, a few escaped, and when darkness fell a good many more managed to get away. It is from them that we have heard some of these things, and the rest has been gathered from German prisoners, for an attack was made on their lines soon after midday, and succeeded in a few isolated spots, though it was beaten off generally ; we had no organisation, and not sufficient troops on the spot to do the thing properly.

“ The men who escaped said they were not given any food, and none was going to be supplied to their unhappy fellows. The Germans' intention was to use them as labourers so long as their

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strength lasted, giving them nothing but water. By the time they were quite exhausted the work would be mostly done, and there would be no further need of them. They will be allowed to die of starvation, I suppose, or possibly they will be shot or stabbed.

“*Later.* Our guns have come up. I hear we have got quite a large number of them, and troops, too, more than I had believed possible for us to muster.

“An hour ago our attack opened, and it is still continuing. The Germans are replying to our fire. I do not know yet how the affair is going. Pray God, we may wipe those devils off the face of the earth!

“The noise is fearful! At every point on the sector we are bombarding their lines, and they are replying. They must have made a large haul at the gun-factory they captured, if everywhere on their front they are able to keep up such a fire as they are doing at this point.

“It is terrible to be incapable of helping, as I am. I hope to be able to give a hand with the wounded presently, but that is the utmost I can do.

“A man has just come in with the news that three regiments have just detrained, come from somewhere in the Midlands. There are said to be some Field Artillery also. I hope it is true, guns are the only things for this business.

“*Still later.* There were guns with the fresh

troops, and they were not long in getting to work. I should not have thought it possible for the roar of the firing to be greater, but it is so—the noise seems to be getting into my brain, and I don't think I shall ever be able to forget it. But I think we must be getting the upper hand now. Pray God, it is so !

“One thing gives me hope, though it is a fearful thing, and that is that all across the country, right out to the coast behind the German lines, I can see fires starting—big fires. They must be burning the towns—fiends that they are ! But they would surely not do this unless they felt that they could no longer hold on to the country they have occupied. I wonder ! The blaze grows every moment, and the whole sky is aflame for miles. But the guns are still at it, the firing has not slackened on either side——”

3

I turned over the page to continue reading, but there was nothing further to read. The letter came at this point to an abrupt end.

Our guest noticed my action and divined my thoughts. “There isn't any more of it,” he informed me ; “I expect the poor chap had to pack up suddenly. Perhaps he had to give it unfinished to some fellow who would be able to post it for him from a place further inland. Something of that sort, it must have been.”

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"But," said I, "is this account to be believed? It seems to me incredible!"

"Of course it's true!" cried Hotham, a little testily. "We shall hear about it soon enough! For the present, as he says, it is being kept dark as much as possible, and not a word is allowed to leak out through the press."

"But," ruminated our Padre, "how could they ever get past our patrols, let alone our submarines and the minefields?"

Hotham half rose in his seat excitedly, exclaiming: "Isn't that just like our English ways? We keep on pooh-poohing every chance of disaster, and saying it can never possibly happen; by-and-bye it *does* happen, and then we cannot for the life of us understand how it could have been brought about!"

"I'll tell you what," I said, "we don't want to pipe this all over the ship. Let us keep it quiet for the present. If you are agreeable, the Padre and I will go and fetch the captain here to your cabin; you shall tell him about it, show him the letter, and if there are any further steps to be taken, he is the proper person to decide on them."

A curious idea had come into my mind, prompting me to make this suggestion. While speaking, I had quietly put the letter in my pocket, and taking for granted our guest's compliance with my plan I moved towards the door. The Padre followed me out.

When past the watertight door that led into the

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next flat we both stopped and looked at each other.

“What do you make of it all?” asked I.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered the Padre, shaking his head dubiously. “I should be inclined to say that I didn’t believe a single word of it, only I was rather flattened out on that argument just now!”

“Well, I feel much the same about it as you do. The letter reads like the truth, and yet there are several glaring discrepancies in it; the sequence of days seems all wrong, for one thing. And did you notice what it said on the subject of gunfire?”

“No, I can’t say I did, particularly. What do you mean?”

“Didn’t it strike you that there was rather a good deal of harping on the *noise*, and that sort of thing?”

“You mean——?”

“Exactly. And that’s what I want to make sure about.”

“How? By asking the captain?”

“No. I’m not going to the captain at all. That was only a blind. I’m going to Hotham—*our* Hotham.”

We found the Marine officer just coming out of the wardroom. Taking him aside quietly, I produced the letter from my pocket.

“Look at this, old man, will you?” I asked, holding the paper before him. “Do you know the handwriting, by any chance?”

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He glanced at it closely, and replied at once :
“ Why, of course, I do ! That’s my brother’s fist.
What is it—a leg-haul, or what ? ”

4

The poor fellow must have been working at this pretended letter at the very time I looked in upon him in his cabin the previous night.

No doubt the practice firing had been too much for him and had brought back all his nerve trouble again, though he had appeared to be none the worse for it at the time and immediately after.

We sent him across to the Hospital Ship the same day, and within the week he was sent south to one of those places where they specialise in cases of the kind, and work such marvellous cures.

“ I don’t think you need worry overmuch about your brother,” our Fleet-Surgeon told Hotham. “ He has had a bad set-back, and it will delay his cure, perhaps, for many months. But he will get all right again sooner or later.”

Our cheery Fleet-Surgeon’s prophecy proved correct to the letter. I met the ex-patient during my last leave, and he was as well and as fit as can be. But I didn’t mention anything about the famous letter. I doubt, in fact, if he remembered anything about it—and I certainly wasn’t going to ask him !

VI. Keeping the Curtain Down



VI. Keeping the Curtain Down.

1

ONCE upon a time I was in a cruiser which acted as guardship at that delectable spot, Port Said, for three solid months on end. We soon exhausted the recreations of the place, consisting chiefly of walks down the canal bank, varied with strolls out to the cemetery, where little armies of crabs scuttled across the road at the sound of approaching footsteps ; and we all agreed that these were the longest three months we had ever spent in our lives.

But when we were at last released, and sailed away for Malta, scarcely had the land of Egypt sunk out of sight before we began to look back upon our sojourn there as the fleeting dream of a moment.

The long drawn out vigil of the Grand Fleet provides a parallel case. The Admiralty have recently given me four chevrons of silver and gold to wear

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on my sleeve, signifying service at sea in the years 1914, 1915, 1916, and 1917. I look at these, finding it hard to realise that it was so long a time, and try to recollect all the many things that must have happened to fill up that protracted period.

But it certainly seemed long enough in the actual experience, and I suppose the reason is that so few really noteworthy events took place to act as milestones and landmarks on the long road.

Or is it that the events only appear to be small because they are now receding into the distance? Of this let the reader be the judge, while I confine my energies to the continuation of my chronicle.

2

We had other visitors to the ship, besides Hotham's brother. Opportunities were given for Army officers to pay short visits to the Grand Fleet, and a good number of them took advantage of the offer, chiefly officers from the overseas dominions. They were detailed off to the various ships of the Fleet, and we in our ship secured our share of them.

These visitors all said they enjoyed themselves, so I suppose they did; but I can tell them one thing now in cold print which we found some difficulty in making them believe while they were with us, and that is that the kindness was really all on their part in coming to enliven us; we were honestly delighted to have them, and rattling good fellows they were, all of them. And if any one of *them*

should happen to run up against any one of *us*, at any old time, in any old corner of the world, I think there will be, as the classical song says, a considerable rise of temperature in the ancient borough this evening !

Imprimis, there was the cheery Major of the Canadian A.M.C., to whom we owe the imperishable story of Medicine Hat. Don't you know it ? Then, perhaps, I had better tell it you.

In a certain township out West the Destroying Angel provided a little mild excitement for an otherwise rather dull community by suddenly snipping off the thread of life of a young fellow whom nobody seemed to know very much about, except that he was a Mason. However, a funeral is something to be grateful for in a place where the only red-letter day for the past four years was when Abe Johnson's heifer ate the flowered bonnet of the Baptist Minister's wife, snatching it from her head while she was looking at the new season's coloured calico prints in the window of the one store in the township, on which the minister preached a topical sermon next sabbath, taking as his text "Thou shalt not steal," the denunciation being apparently aimed personally at the cow ; where-upon the rival Congregationalist man, who was a bachelor, and had never been asked to tea at the Baptist manse, waded in the following week with a stirring address on the subject of "Vanity," with special reference to the wearing of flowered bonnets.

So it was considered to be no more than the

fair thing to give the deceased young fellow as slap-up a funeral as possible, even going so far as to procure the services of a brother Mason to deliver an appropriate oration.

Unfortunately, there was no one else of the craft in the whole township, so they were obliged to send and get one from the neighbouring township of Medicine Hat.

This gentleman arrived as requested, and at the obsequies he delivered the looked-for oration. He said: "Waal, I can't tell you much about the virtues of our deceased brother, principally because I never met him and never even heard of him before yesterday. He may have been a durn good sort—probably was; but nobody seems to know anything about him any more'n I do, so we'd better let it go at that. But I guess there's something I *can* tell you about, and that's the smart little go-ahead township of Medicine Hat!"

The moral of this story lay in the application thereof. Our cheery friend said he didn't know much about the British Navy, except by hearsay, but he could tell us all about Canada, and we should all be made welcome there if ever we chose to visit that country. Here's to you, Major!

Item, another Canadian, this time of the artillery, who in a most unassuming and pleasant way gave up his time each evening to the delivery of informal little lectures, or, rather, conversational talks, on that particular part of the war which was within his own immediate experience; and most fascinating

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were the descriptions and explanations which he gave, illustrating them with maps and drawings which were a revelation to most of us. He made no attempt to pose as a lecturer, but simply laid out his papers on the seat beside him, and if people liked to blow along he would tell them about things; the result was that he always had an audience of about half the wardroom—and we learnt more about the war from him than we had ever been able to learn before.

There were several other visitors, each one with gifts and graces of his own that made him a very welcome guest and his stay only too brief. But though I cannot chronicle all of them, I cannot omit the mention of Pa and Little Willie, the delightful pair who came on board the ship to pay an afternoon call, and stayed three days. It was the nicest compliment we ever had paid to us; and I think that we all regretted that those two bright spirits could not stay three weeks instead of those all too short three days in which we were far less the entertainers than the entertained. The best of luck to you, Pa and Little Willie, and may we meet again!

3

And we had another visitor, who deserves a paragraph all to himself. This was none other than Harry Lauder, who was good enough to come on board one afternoon and entertain our ship's

company in his own inimitable manner. And not our ship's company alone, for by the aid of our resourceful carpenter and his staff, arrangements were made for the accommodation of men from several other ships. The upper deck was just one sea of faces. Men who found no room on the extemporised benches crowded on to the top of the turret, and even out along the guns; and from the fore end of the after superstructure were suspended three rows of staging, all filled with the bluejacket onlookers.

Needless to relate, the entertainment itself was of the surpassing excellence which one has been led to expect from so great an artist. But I think that the "unrehearsed effects" were even more appreciated. Being induced to address a few words to his novel audience, the great comedian delivered a magnificent little speech, serious in tone and overflowing with enthusiasm and patriotic spirit, which evoked an outburst of spontaneous applause from everyone who listened to its stirring words.

And an unrehearsed effect of another kind, showing that Mr. Lauder's wit does not depend upon premeditated efforts, was when he first stepped forward to face his audience, and found even more striking than the assembled hundreds those mighty guns towering above him.

A quick upward glance from his keen blue eyes towards those grim monsters was not lost upon the sailors who sat astride of them.

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"The guns are all right, Harry," called down one of the bluejackets.

"Oh, ay! Ah ken they're a'richt," came the quick response, "*else ye'd no be haein' a ha'f-holiday!*"

4

And while I am on the subject of pleasant happenings I may mention the visits which our ship paid on occasions to a port rather nearer to civilisation than that of our first rendezvous.

Nothing will induce me to particularise this place; but I trust it is legitimate to mention that there were houses, and shops, and delightful picnicking spots further afield, and pleasant people very ready to offer the hospitality for which their nation is so justly famous.

There were also rooms to let, generally at prices which argued a profound disbelief of the theory that the Navy is the Poor Man's Profession. Moreover, the local landladies had evolved the idea that any enclosed space of the size of an ordinary boot-cupboard was to be considered a commodious apartment eligible for letting to the Sassenach visitors.

I accompanied the Oaf one day on a search for rooms. After hunting vainly for a while, we at last lighted upon some which appeared really quite comfortable and not more than usually exorbitant in price.

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“And how about cooking and attendance?” asked Meredyth with some diffidence.

The good dame shook her head discouragingly, even disapprovingly, and unbent so far as to reply: “Oh, we couldna *think* of doin’ that for ye. You see, we should have no time for our own worrrk!”

Yet, in spite of such handicaps the little place speedily became filled with all sorts and conditions of wives, from the blushing girl bride whose wedding-ring had not yet lost the lustre of the jeweller’s polish, to the trusty partner who had already followed her good man to half the foreign ports in the atlas, and was ready to pack up at a moment’s notice and follow him to the other half.

And there were children, too. Not very many of them, because it was too much of an undertaking for the majority of mothers to transplant their offsprings as well as themselves for so short a time; so the babies were left behind in the care of accommodating grannies, who of course knew ever so much more about the proper upbringing of children than the poor inexperienced parents, and were only too glad to have this opportunity of treating the darlings as they *ought* to be treated; and the older ones were left at boarding schools, bemoaning their hard fate, since they knew well what good times are to be had when ships are within reach—and ships had been so impossibly out of reach for *such* an age!

Miss Trythall was one of the favoured few who did come. The *Windsor Castle* chanced to be in

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company with us at the time, and of course our old messmate brought his small family on board to revisit their old friends.

Nothing could be more delightful than to see them again, of course; but it was just a little disconcerting when Miss Trythall, at a big wardroom luncheon party, stabbed the silence of a conversational lull with the shrill question: "And how many children have *you* got by this time, Marjorie?"

The Oaf was, at the moment, engaged in emptying a tankard of beer; he stopped, struggled hard not to choke, was defeated, and had to dash from the room, uttering wild and weird noises as he went.

Madden rose nobly to the occasion. Fixing Miss Trythall with his glance, he remarked: "Pooh! Mrs. Meredyth hasn't got any children! *She's* nobody! Look at me—now, *I've* got exactly four thousand two hundred and seventy-six little boys and one little girl!"

"*Have* you?" exclaimed Miss Trythall delightedly, "and where do you keep 'em all?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I can't keep them as well as I should like to. I lost a couple of hundred of them in the post a week or two ago."

"In the post? But you can't lose little boys and girls in the post! It's only letters what gets lost there!"

"Oh, yes, *I* can! You see, I tie them up in nice thick brown paper and send them by parcel post to places all over England and when they come

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back through the dead letter office I post them off again somewhere else. That saves having to keep a house for them all."

"But why have you only got one little girl with all those little boys?"

"Oh, because if I had any more little girls I should have to spend all my time answering their questions, don't you see?"

Miss Trythall *did* see, and the luncheon party breathed a sigh of relief and resumed the interrupted conversation.

We went shopping almost every day while the opportunity lasted. It was a great treat to us, after having been so long deprived of the chance of doing so. The consequence was that we bought all manner of completely useless things just for the pleasure of spending our money. The gunroom officers, in particular, came off nightly to the ship laden with wonderful purchases, but they had slightly more sense than their elders, in that they mostly specialised in eatables to supplement the somewhat unexciting menus prepared by the gun-room messman.

The sailors also bought freely of such gear as charmed their eyes, chiefly inclining towards fancy boxes and hand-bags, scarves and neckties, all made of bright plaid silk; and one of the shopkeepers informed me that more tartan had been sold over his counter during our stay than had been used by all the clans put together since the days of Wallace. I think it just possible he may

have been exaggerating ever so little, but he ought to know !

5

One of our midshipmen had, some time previously, left us to go to a ship of the *n*th Cruiser Squadron. His ship came later to our anchorage for a few days, and of course he quickly made his way on board to see his old messmates and relate his experience.

But he could not tell us very much that we did not know before. We were all kept constantly aware of the existence of the *n*th C.S. and its arduous work ; how it kept up the blockade unceasingly, in the face of the utmost difficulties.

There are so many auxiliary naval services, fleets of strange and varying types, subsidiary to the Grand Fleet, and each one of them has its own particular glory. But none of them can beat the splendid record of the *n*th C.S.

Mind you, the men of that squadron have a proper idea of the value of their work. " If things had been left to *us*," any one of them will tell you, " we should have finished off the war in the first couple of years ! " And then he will mutter complainingly and moodily about the Foreign Office and those beastly politicians, with a fine contempt for all the niceties of international complications and correct procedure.

Perhaps he is right ; and perhaps not. At any rate, he and his fellows do their work month after

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month, as they have done it since the commencement of the war, in the face of the tremendous difficulties provided not only by the politicians but by the elements themselves, and by the nature of their peculiar task.

I said just now that we in the Grand Fleet already knew something of the work of the *n*th C.S. Partly we knew it through the medium of intercepted wireless messages; such messages were constantly being exchanged, and a very frequent form of them was something after this fashion:

“Patagonian Steamship ‘Las Olas,’ Bahia Blanca to Gotenborg. Left October 18th. Cargo wheat, wool, and general. Description, two funnels painted grey with green band and black top. Four masts, black hull. Should be intercepted and sent in with armed guard.”

(The above signal is, of course, a fanciful one, well camouflaged so as not to assist the enemy; but it is sufficiently close to type to illustrate the procedure.)

Imagine now the ships of the *n*th C.S., all strung out on their own lines of patrol, stretching over the gap between Scotland and the North Cape, and well out into the Atlantic. Every single ship would have taken in the signal, and would then be on the look-out for the steamer described.

Presently the *Las Olas* would come along, shoving her blunt nose into the Atlantic rollers and steadily forging ahead at her lumbering speed of nine knots

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towards the port where she hoped to be lucky enough to arrive without interference from the cursed British Navy, and discharge her cargo—destined finally for Germany.

Perhaps she might somehow succeed in eluding the first line of patrols. Not always, of course, but there was just a chance. But there was little cause for self-congratulation in this. Another line was waiting for her, and another, and another, all spreading their meshes so that not even the smallest and nimblest fry had one chance in a thousand of getting through.

So, sooner or later, the *Las Olas* would be hailed by some ship of the *nth* C.S.

In the earlier days of the war the routine of the next stage of the proceedings was: The cruiser stopped when the steamer approached, and, lowering a boat in any sea not quite impossible—and the seas considered possible for boat work by the *nth* C.S. are such as a landsman would look upon as a most unpleasant form of certain death—the vessel was boarded and her skipper interviewed with all courtesy and consideration; an armed guard of an officer and a handful of men was placed on board, and the steamer headed for a given base; while the cruiser, having hoisted her boat again, disappeared into the fog-bank or the driving snow-storm, to sweep the sub-arctic seas upon her lawful occasions.

Many and various were the vessels thus intercepted and examined. Ships of every nationality,

most of them with their country's colours painted on their sides in enormous streaks and patches, making them appear more like circus posters than sober merchant vessels. Not infrequently on a foggy morning, when the ocean had been resounding with syrens and foghorns in every key from unseen ships all around, the fog-bank would suddenly lift, and disclose an assemblage of highly-painted craft that gave the impression of a coloured plate of Flags of All Nations.

Some of these industrious merchantmen, however, were not so innocent as they pretended to be. I am not referring merely to the blockade-runners, the ships that risked capture or detention for the sake of the enormous profits to be made by running cargoes to Germany; there were plenty of these, naturally, and it must have been very annoying to them when the fine meshes of the net of the *n*th C.S. caught them. But, besides these, there were others; others that suggested the precaution taken later by every patrol cruiser when holding up a merchantman, namely, that it was better to steam away and keep the cargo-ship dead astern, signalling her to close the boat which was dropped and left behind to be picked up afterwards. In this way it was out of the question for the peaceful tramp to fire a sudden broadside at the cruiser!

It must be, one would think, an uncomfortable sensation for the examining officer and his boat's crew, when the falls were cast off, to watch their ship disappearing into the distance and to wait

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for the oncoming merchantman, wondering if she would turn out to be just the ordinary cargo-boat with a short-tempered skipper grumbling loudly at the ways of the Navy, or something of the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing type.

I daresay they don't worry much about it. Sailor-men are built that way. If bad joss comes, it comes, that's all; meanwhile, get on with the work.

So it is probable that there was not a trace of anxiety or foreboding when one day a boat's crew coming alongside a vessel was suddenly met by a volley which killed every man instantly. This much, at least, is satisfactory, that their deaths were of a kind which, according to the dictum of Julius Cæsar, is the most desirable of all—the unexpected. And a further source of satisfaction rests in the knowledge that their deaths were well and speedily avenged.

Yes, taking all things into consideration, I do not know that there is any seawork which, as a combination of deadly monotony, trying weather conditions, and occasional lurid moments, can hold a candle to the ordinary routine of the *n*th C.S.

6

If, in some respects, our life was one of monotony, it was a life of changes in others. Winters and summers came and went, and these varying seasons in themselves provided changes far more marked

than in the more equable South. Scapa, as I have already mentioned, enjoys a winter climate little more severe than that of Devonshire; but it is darker, certainly, and is dowered with those special "lighting effects" which are the peculiar property of the Far North. So in the dark months, there used to be sometimes quite a crowd gathering on the upper deck to watch the wonderful pyrotechnic display of the Aurora Borealis, which shines there with peculiar brilliancy. At other places visited by us in the winter months the cold was far more intense than in that particular base; the decks were frequently covered with snow to a depth of several inches. We had a destroyer alongside us once, and in the pitchy blackness of one bitter cold night one of her men slipped on the ice-covered steel deck in the middle watch, and fell overboard between the two vessels. The shock of the bitterly cold water must have prevented him from even uttering a cry. He was never seen again, and only when he was discovered to be missing could his fate be deduced from the evidence of the marks on the deck where he slid and fell.

In summer time the contrast was extraordinarily marked. Many a time have I stood and watched the men on the upper deck during the dog watches, and thought what a ripping film the scene would make if only there were an operator to take it. Several hundred men would be amusing themselves in the glorious sunshine, in many different ways, and no one party interfering with

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another, or, indeed, taking the slightest notice of it.

The most popular form of amusement was the dance; and the most popular dance was one of which I do not know the name, but I can describe it for the benefit of those who are more learned in such matters than myself.

Imagine some fifty couples, all in bluejackets' rig, the "lady" frequently being a brawny, bearded seaman, each couple well and truly secured together in due form—that is to say, the "gentleman" has his right hand firmly braced against the middle of his partner's back, while his left arm is rigidly extended outwards and upwards with the delicate fingers of the "lady" closely intertwined with his own.

When the music starts—and our ship was famed for a really good amateur orchestra—the fifty couples form up in line ahead and move off in a kind of minuet step, two paces advance, two paces retire, feet well lifted from the deck, toes pointed downwards. Really, I wish I could make this description sound a little less like Swedish drill! This forwards and backwards business would never bring the couples away from their original starting-place, of course, so a waltz step is introduced into the proceedings at this stage, and it is performed in the way beloved of all sailors, that is to say, with a very minute turning-circle, or, as I have heard it described, "going round on a threepenny-bit." The line of couples makes its slow advance

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down the outboard side and back close to the centre-line of the ship. It is a very solemn affair, and the dancing devotees go through the motions with all due seriousness. Further, it is very like hard work, and when the energetic little orchestra crashes out the final chord the dancers break away, and find it necessary to mop their glistening faces.

Not all the room was taken up by the dancers, however. There was plenty of space for other amusements. In one corner, for example, a pair of masked and padded forms might be seen lunging away vigorously at each other at bayonet practice ; in another, two boxing enthusiasts sparring energetically, gory but good-humoured.

On the other side of the deck the horizontal bar would provide entertainment for a crowd of performers and spectators ; the former being in many cases very adept, displaying such skill as would have done credit to an acrobatic artiste at the " halls."

If you would picture this scene aright you must also imagine a considerable number of other men threading their way from time to time among the dancers and the athletes : seamen, marines, stokers, sick bay men, bandsmen, and others, going to and fro on their lawful occasions as their duties required. And, besides these, little knots of men standing by the rails quietly smoking and yarning ; and, very often, another lot sitting on the torpedo net shelf with their legs dangling over the ship's side, all

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absorbed in the art and practice of fishing, and not without something to show for it too, as was testified by a number of nice little fish flopping about in buckets on the deck behind the seated fishermen.

Yes, it all would have made a very good film; and the necessary comic relief was there as well, since every ship's company seems to include one fat man who, by a well-considered provision of nature, is invariably the ship's funny man as well!

7

But I meant to write about changes other than those merely of the seasons—changes amongst ourselves and throughout the Fleet.

For, with the war continuing so long, it was, of course, impossible to keep officers and men unchanged for an indefinite period. At the beginning the changes were few; but when it became evident that the end was very far from being in sight—well, something had to be done. Otherwise—as we sometimes indulged our fancy in forecasting—it seemed indicated that, before the war was over, captains in the Fleet would be white-haired octogenarians, the admirals doddering old Rip Van Winkles, and the junior snotties lively young fellows of forty-five or thereabouts.

Obviously, this would never do. So, after a little while, reversion was made to the system of changes very much on the peace-time scale.

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In our own ship the occasions when we had to welcome a coming and speed a parting messmate worked out roughly at about once in a couple of months on the average.

The manner of the new-comer's arrival never varied much. Any suspicions of shyness at appearing amongst strangers which a man may have suffered from in his early youth tend to become effectually dispelled after a few years in the Navy ; and as for making a fuss about shifting out of one billet into entirely new surroundings, there is no use in making heavy weather over that sort of thing when one has to reckon with the possibility of being pitchforked out to China or the Mediterranean at twenty-four hours' notice as a mere matter of course.

And, after all, one ship is generally pretty much like another ship, and the vast majority of N.O.'s are quite easy to get along with.

So the new-comer just blows in quietly, probably recognising at least one old shipmate or station-mate as he enters the wardroom ; someone takes charge of him, in any case, and shows him which cabin he is to have ; he makes his way there, and finds a marine servant already told off for him in the act of unpacking his gear—which, by the way, is exactly like every other N.O.'s gear, consisting of a couple of tin uniform cases, a well-travelled gladstone or two, possibly a gun-case or a fishing-rod, and almost for a certainty a set of golf-clubs.

By the end of the day he has settled down in the ship as well as if he had been there for a year ; and

if he chances to be a lieutenant his fellow watch-keepers will by this time have seen to it that he has already kept his first watch on board his new ship.

But if all arrivals were more or the less after one and the same fashion, a departure might take many different forms.

Frequently it was just a quiet fading away, especially in the case of those who had been long in the ship and wished to avoid making a parade of the breaking up of old fellowships. In such cases an officer would make every endeavour to disappear without the fact becoming known. Usually, however, he was not altogether successful in this; as he came up from his cabin to get down into the boat, he would be pretty sure to find a circle of his mess-mates formed up around the head of the gangway, waiting to give a parting shake of the hand and a cheery word to speed him on his way. And when, somewhat overwhelmed by this unexpected ordeal, the departing officer hurried down the ladder into the boat with his voice just a trifle throaty and his eyes just the least bit dim, he would look back to the old ship he was leaving—the old Home, he almost felt it to be at this moment—and, why, blest if there wasn't the ship's band lined up for'ard, coming entirely on their own without a hint from anybody just to put their whole heart and soul into the rousing strain, "For he's a jolly good fellow!"

But in some other cases the parting ceremonies were not conducted on such quiet lines. I have

heard that amongst certain savage tribes where human sacrifice prevails it is customary to garland and feast the victim and, generally speaking, give him a regular high old time before sending him off on his long journey. I do not wish for a moment to imply that naval officers are a savage tribe, but it is unquestionable that a similar custom is sometimes practised amongst us.

One of the Mess Committee sends for the messman some morning and informs him :

“Look here, Messman, Mr. So-and-so is leaving us to-morrow. We want you to put on a real good dinner to night, the very best you can do.”

To which the messman, if he is anything like the standard type, resourceful and infinitely obliging, replies, “Very good, sir, leave it to me”; quite unperturbed by any considerations of food shortage or short notice. I have sometimes thought that messmen must have invented some secret plan of keeping a ten-course dinner for thirty people tucked away somewhere up their sleeve or in a sideboard cupboard, ready to be produced all fresh and hot at any given moment ; if they haven’t got some magic plan of this nature, why then I simply don’t know how they do it—but they do !

The Commander, as the President of the ward-room mess, has the guest of the evening seated at his right hand. No, you needn’t be afraid that I am going to imitate the complete newspaper reporter and describe exactly what a number of festive people have to eat and how they eat it. Let’s skip all that,

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and get to the speeches which begin as soon as the toast of the King has been drunk.

And, on second thoughts, let's cut out the speeches also ; many a departing officer would be glad enough to do this in reality, though, as a matter of fact, the speeches quite frequently are really very good indeed.

All that is necessary is that you should try and imagine an extremely contented dinner-party with the usual trimmings. The important thing really is the after-dinner entertainment, variable according to the nature and status of the guest of the evening and the mood of the mess in general. It may take the mild form of a massed game of snooker, three people taking turns at every cue. At the other end of the scale it can be a most enjoyable rag, which it is advisable to prepare for by removing monkey-jackets, since these cost more to replace than the linen subsoil, and one or the other has got to go, if not both. There will probably be also a certain amount of damage done to the wardroom furniture ; but " it is a rich firm," and any naval carpenter will tell you that if it were not for this sort of thing he would never know how to fill in his time.

And somewhere between these two extremes comes the festive sing-song, which is quite a popular form of entertainment since everybody can and does take a part in it whether gifted with a " voice " or not.

Naval officers are not, as a class, musical ; they are mostly caught too young for the disease to get a real hold on them. But there are exceptions to the

rule, and often a surgeon or a padre can be discovered who has had the time in his early youth to learn how to run a piano.

The Naval Song Book does the rest. And even if the words are a bit hard to remember, and harder still to read when there are about a dozen people trying to get a glimpse over the pianist's shoulder at the one and only copy, what matter, provided the chorus goes with a swing ?

So passes the evening ; very enjoyably, as I have before remarked. And early next morning when the marine servants come in with brooms and buckets to clean up the place for the coming day, the corporal, a seasoned Old Soldier, looks around admiringly and approvingly, observing, "Yes, judging by the looks o' things, it must ha' bin a ree-markably pleasant little conversationy !"

8

But of all the many changes which took place amongst us the one that made the deepest impression of all was the change of our Commander-in-Chief.

One frequently hears it said, on occasions of a like nature, that the departure is felt by everybody as a personal loss. It is, I know, a hackneyed way of putting things ; but I really do not know any other terms that so exactly express what Jellicoe's going meant to us all. In our own ship, I know, every officer and every man without exception went

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about looking as though he were lamenting the loss not only of a trusted chief but a *friend*: and I suppose it was much the same in every other ship.

Jellicoe *belonged* to us; he had that gift, or that quality, of making all those under his command, even such as had never even seen him, feel that there was a sort of personal tie between him and them.

People spoke about him very familiarly, as they would not have done except about a man for whom they had real love as well as high respect. Rough trawler-skippers would mention casually how they had cracked a word with Jellicoe, or how they had seen the little man on his quarter-deck last time they were passing; they mentioned these things just in the same way as they would talk about meeting one of their old fishing-fleet chums—but, oh, the betraying glint of pride in their eyes!

“ ‘E’s ’uman ”; such is the reported summing-up of Jellicoe’s character by a bluejacket of the Fleet, and no lengthy analysis could hit the nail on the head half so neatly as those two words. Jellicoe’s consummate seamanship, his perfect mastery of tactics, his marvellous cool-headedness, were the admiration of those who were in a position to know about such attributes of the Admiral; but that which endeared him to those as well as to the vast majority who had little opportunity of gauging his professional skill, was simply the wide humanity of the man.

Very typical of the humility which does not

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always go so closely hand in hand with greatness as here it invariably went, was Jellicoe's choice of a title for his viscounty. Had he chosen to call himself Jellicoe of Jutland there could have been no room for anything but approval of such a title, combining a pleasing alliteration with the just dues of honour gleaned from a great victory. But the title which he did choose, Jellicoe of Scapa, was one which honoured not himself alone but every man under his command. Not everybody who worked for him had the good fortune to be in the Jutland battle; there were very many who felt they possessed an equal share in the man though they never left the base, and these in particular felt the thrill of infinite satisfaction which really pervaded all when Admiral Jellicoe elected to be called by the name of that Scapa which he had *made*, and where also he made the Grand Fleet which achieved so much under his leadership.

9

"How many, did you say, were saved?"

"One man."

"Only one man! Good Lord! Pretty awful, isn't it?"

"Bad show. Anyhow, the others probably didn't have time to know what was happening. That's something!"

"I hope so. In fact I suppose one may take that as a certainty. A quick and painless end—

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after all, what better can one ask for, in war-time ? ”

At the back of our minds while we were talking thus was the picture of a bright and happy young face ; the face of one of our junior wardroom officers who had left us only a few weeks previously to join the *Vanguard*.

Just that close personal connexion, that one intimate link—it made all the difference ! I do not mean to say that without it we should not have realised the appalling nature of the disaster ; but this served to make the reality of it all the more sad to us, and we went softly, thinking of little else, for at least twenty-four hours : longer than this cannot be given to any shock or sorrow in times like these.

“ Thank goodness we have at last dropped that rotten silly phrase of ‘ ships of no military value,’ ” commented Hotham ; “ that was enough to give anyone the ruddy heaves ! ”

“ Well,” soothingly spoke the Paymaster, “ they couldn’t have said it in this case, anyhow. But, to take a fair view of things, ships don’t count for as much as men, even the best ships ; we might have replaced the old *Vanguard*,—but her crew—that is a different matter ! ”

“ Yes, of course, it’s the men that matter ! ” continued Hotham, still explosive and refusing to be calmed down. “ Do you remember when the *Natal* went up ? Some female on the beach saw the flames going up and squeaked out, ‘ Oh, my !

What a funny sight ! Whatever can it be ? ' An N.O. walking past her turned and said to her, ' Only about a thousand men going to their death, Madam, that's all ! ' "

" Well, you needn't be so hard on her : I don't suppose she realised for a moment what it was until she was told, and then of course she was just as sorry as anybody else."

" Hm ! "—Hotham was still quite unreasonably angry, and refused to be quieted by argument. Not quite unreasonably, perhaps, because the young officer who had gone from us to the doomed ship had been a special pal of his. So, headed off on one track he started on another.

" Anyway, I call it very dirty work ! "

" Too soon to say that. Wait and see what they find out at the enquiry. As likely as not it was the result of an accident."

" Accident my foot ! I'll bet anything you like it was dirty Hun work and nothing else ! "

" Oh, I don't know ! Remember the *Jean Bart* going up ? That was in peace-time—no suspicion of foul play there. And then there was the old *Fox*, when she was out in the East Indies—only she had her hatches open, so the force of the explosion came upwards instead of going downwards, and not much harm was done. But it shows that accidents of the sort *can* happen ! "

" And why," queried Madden, breaking in at this point, " in any case, why do you call it ' dirty work ' ? "

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Hotham, delighted to have an antagonist willing to fight with foils off, turned upon the newcomer at once.

“Don’t *you* call it dirty work, then ?” he snapped out.

“You mean, supposing your view is correct, that it wasn’t an accident but a deliberate act done somehow or other by German agency ? Well, no, I can’t say I see anything particularly dirty about it !”

“Then I’m sorry for you ! *Not* dirty work, to carry out a diabolical plan for blowing up a thousand unsuspecting men in an instant ?”

“Well, a mine or a torpedo would do the same thing exactly, wouldn’t it ? Where’s the difference ?”

“There’s a great deal of difference. Those are recognised methods of warfare, and this is low-down ruddy treachery !”

“Is it ? I’m not so sure. Supposing that you, at this very moment, had it in your power by pressing a button to blow a German battleship sky-high, wouldn’t you be a traitor to your country if you were to refuse to press it ?”

“Madden, you’re a cold-blooded jesuitical little beast ! You’d argue the Angel Gabriel into pocket-picking, I believe ! And as you’ve got such a darned lot to say about pressing buttons, suppose you press that one over the settee, will you ?”

Madden laughed, as he acted upon the broad hint and prepared to quench the heat of argument

in something liquid. "After all," said he, "I don't suppose anybody will ever know the real cause of it, so where's the sense of our cagging? All we know is that there's a thousand good men gone to glory, and it's up to us to avenge 'em if ever we get half a dog's chance of doing so; meanwhile, we'll just carry on!"

10

Three experts of a certain naval branch came to spend a few days on board us. They were pleasant, quiet-mannered fellows, absorbed in their own particular work, as most specialists are.

Most of the day they were busied about the special job they had come for, so that we really saw little of them till the evening, and beyond seeing that they were looked after and had everything they wanted, we were hardly conscious of their presence amongst us.

Indeed, by this time we had had so many visitors and of such varied types, that if a brace of Cabinet Ministers or an expert chiropodist had been assigned to us as guests we should have thought it nothing strange, but should have seen to their comforts as well as we could, and for the rest left them to fit into the routine, and make themselves happy in their own way.

One thing, however, we always looked for from our guests and temporary messmates. Like children tired of their toys and not allowed to go out and

play, we looked to a visitor from the outside world with the request, not always expressed in words : " Tell us a story ! "

Anything to enliven the dull monotony of this enforced and unwanted idleness. A story, especially of what other fellows were *doing*, in the many spheres of activity outside the Grand Fleet. *We* had no stories to tell—that wasn't our fault, but the Germans', who refused to let us write history on the sides of their battleships ; we didn't exactly envy other people who actually did things, but we did want to hear about them, and if anybody came amongst us who had something to tell, why, we wanted to hear all about it !

Martin, the senior of the three, quite unexpectedly one evening ministered to our requirements, and unburdened himself of a story, unasked.

We had already gathered that his principal occupation was Fritz-chasing—that is to say, hunting German submarines. Though in what particular way he did it, or how his special branch of scientific knowledge aided him, we were entirely ignorant.

Martin was sitting in a deep arm-chair near the wardroom fire, quietly enjoying a pipe and listening to the conversation going on around him, without taking much part in it himself.

Our little Padre was spinning a yarn—as he very frequently was, in fact, so much so that at times it was almost impossible to stop him when once he was properly wound up.

On this occasion his yarn related to a curious

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misadventure which, he asserted, had happened to certain armed drifters.

An instructor, he said, was explaining to a drifter's crew the nature and use of the depth charges which had been fitted in the vessel. He was showing how the depth-charges were connected up with the electric battery, and how they could be fired by depressing a key when this connection was made.

"You must be very careful," said the instructor, "*never* to press the key when the gear is connected up, except, of course, when in action against an enemy, or else you will blow yourselves up. So long as it is unconnected you can press the key as much as you want to. For example, with the wires as they are now I just press the key, and nothing——"

Bang!!!

Fortunately, no one was hurt, but the stern of the drifter was blown clean out!

"Which just shows," added the Padre, "how very sure one ought to be of one's——"

"Never mind what it shows," we said to him, "we don't want any of that now—we hear enough of you on Sundays!"

Martin, who had been listening gravely without a smile, took his pipe from his lips and commented:

"Depth-charges are all very well in their way, but they're not so certain as our stunt."

Of course, we pricked up our ears, asking for more.

"Did you ever hear of a brave U-boat captain?"

he went on. "No, I s'pose you'll say there's no such thing. And I'm quite with you—in the majority of cases. After all, I expect the poor brutes get driven to sea without a chance to refuse, knowing that they're precious unlikely ever to see home again, so you can't look for them to be very brave under those circumstances, can you ?

"And a pretty mess they make of their job, too ! Why, with all the submarines they can rake together, three or four hundred of 'em, I suppose there must be, what sort of a bag do they manage to make ? About a couple of ships a day—and that with hundreds and hundreds coming and going in and out of our ports, and hundreds more on the high seas ! Pitiful business, I call it ! Why, if *our* submarine fellows had the same chances and didn't succeed in bagging at least fifty ships every day, they wouldn't *wait* to be court-martialled—they'd hang themselves with their own boot-laces for a set of incompetent ullages ! But those U-boat fellows, poor wonks, are simply scared out of their wits, and don't dare risk themselves too much. Can't say I blame 'em, either !

"But I did come across *one* chap that had some guts in him, once.

"You know the general lines we fellows work on, don't you ? We reckon that once we have sighted a U-boat it is all up with him. He may dive and hope to sneak away under the surface, but that doesn't do him a bit of good ! He's bound to come up again, sooner or later, and then Fritz

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has the surprise of his life to find we're still watching him. By-and-bye he *must* stay on top, to re-charge his batteries, and then—well, then we get him ! ”

It all seemed so very simple to our friend, who took his strange work very much as a matter of course.

“ But,” queried one of us, “ what about the U-boat man who had guts in him ? Did he put up a fight, or what ? ”

“ Oh, him ? No, he didn't put up a fight—some of 'em do, now and then ; silly sort o' thing to do, o' course. Other times they just come floating up to the top and give themselves up quietly—much the wisest course they can adopt ; makes less trouble for all concerned. But the fellow I was talking about, he didn't do either. He must ha' been too game to give his boat up, and I guess his men weren't game enough to let him put up a scrap.”

“ What *did* he do, then ? ”

“ Well, there is only one thing else that he could do, and he did it. He just let his boat rest quietly down below, and blew it up himself. *I* call that darned plucky of him ! ”

We agreed. It *was* a plucky thing to do ; and a pity there weren't more U-boat men of the same type.

“ Yes,” said Martin as he knocked out his pipe preparatory to turning in, “ it would save us a lot of trouble if they would all copy his example.”

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He looked at the matter from his own personal point of view.

11

This particular expert belonged to the Royal Naval Reserve. He was one of a great number of R.N.R. officers who cast in their lot with us, some for short periods and others for a prolonged stay. In fact there were many of them who took a permanent place amongst the complement of officers, not only in our ship but throughout the Fleet.

And a very good thing too! We certainly couldn't have got along without them, when the Navy became so enormously enlarged. But it was a good thing also in another sense, the personal sense, both for ourselves and for them.

This fact was put into words very aptly by an R.N.R. officer who told me what he thought about it during an afternoon stroll on Flotta.

"The Navy and the Merchant Service will never be the same again, after the war," said he.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, we used to think of you fellows as a lot of toffs, with a tremendous amount of side, much too high and mighty to condescend to speak to people like us. So we just fought shy of you, and the less we had to do with you the better we were pleased."

"Yes," I said, "we noticed that, in the old days. And we used to think of you as a pretty average lot of stiffs, if the truth must be told. But

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we have changed our views a bit, on both sides, haven't we ? ”

“ I suppose it is simply that we have got to *know* each other. And both parties have made the discovery that the other fellows are simply ordinary human beings, for the most part real good sorts, with a few wrong 'uns here and there.”

“ And you think that will alter things, after the war ? ” I asked.

“ Well, don't you think so yourself ? Suppose a man-o'-war sends an officer-of-the-guard on board some big cargo-boat, say in Singapore, or Dunedin, or Halifax, in ten years' time. He steps over the gangway all toggged up with frock-coat and sword, looking like all the Lords of the Admiralty and the Trinity Brethren rolled into one—and instead of everybody clearing off and wishing him to blazes, the chances are that some fellow will dash along and say, ‘ Why, blest if that isn't jolly old Snooks who was in the old *Whatnot* with me ! ’ And then, of course, everything will be all right ! ”

“ Yes, I suppose that's so. And even supposing jolly old Snooks doesn't recognise any old pals on board the cargo boat, he will know that some amongst 'em are bound to be pals of *his* pals, so to speak ; and they will know that even if they've never set eyes on him before he is probably just the same kind of bloke as the others they *have* met—so everything will still be all gay ! ”

Yes, there is no doubt about it, the Navy and the Merchant Service will never be “ quite the

same again" as they were before. And that's one good thing we shall owe to the war.

12

We had not seen anything of Trythall or of the *Windsor Castle* for a considerable time. Those cheery little week-ends when he used to bring his destroyer to lie alongside us had been few of late months, and we missed seeing him blow on board amongst his old messmates, just as we also missed clambering down into the depths of his little craft "for social duties."

But we understood the reason for his absence. Trythall's flotilla had been detailed for convoy work, and this meant his being away for long periods; even at such times as he was in harbour he could not afford to spend the few hours in the amenities of ship-visiting; there was too much to be done about the boat.

Then, one day there came a rumour, springing from no one knows where, that the *Windsor Castle* had gone down.

We disbelieved it, of course. Several other destroyers, also chummy ships of ours, had before this been sunk by rumour and had re-appeared with nothing whatever the matter with them.

A little later, however, came a report from a more reliable source to which we were forced to give credence; the *Windsor Castle* was undoubtedly lost; details being lacking, except on one point,

namely that she was lost in action with the enemy.

And what about poor old Trythall ?

Trythall was lost, too. Trythall was saved, and was on his way back in another destroyer. All hands were lost. Half the crew had escaped. Those who were not killed had been taken prisoners.

Amongst a mass of such rumours it was quite impossible to disentangle the truth.

Then, after a while the real facts began to filter through. Two officers and a few of the men had been saved. All the others were killed or drowned. But was our old messmate one of the two officers saved ? Still we did not know.

At last the full news came. And the great thing, the only thing, to think of was that our friend had maintained the reputation of his old ship and the *Windsor Castle* together in keeping up the old tradition and going down with his ship.

Not yet did we know the way he met his fate, but of this we felt certain—that he had put up a good fight.

For him we had no fears ; and, when we came to think the matter over quietly, not very many regrets. For the old saying is none the less true for being a platitude, that a man can die but once, and what better death can a man ask for than to die fighting the enemy ? So utterly hackneyed have such phrases become that we should have felt ashamed to repeat them to each other ; but I think we all felt their truth, and their consolation.

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But what of poor Myra, and Miss Trythall? Ah, that was a very different matter!

"Women are the losers in every war."

That was another trite saying which *would* leap to the mind now!

Those of us who knew the little house standing back from the Dorchester Road, pictured it as it must be now. We could see a dear light-hearted happy woman changed in a moment into a stricken thing, white-faced and wild-eyed, and shaken with tearless sobbing; with an awed and frightened child plucking at her skirts, knowing with the wonderful intuition of childhood exactly what had happened, and striving to attract her mother's notice so that she might comfort her, and be comforted.

We could see the very fall of the blow. The young wife bravely trying to make the best of her loneliness by busying herself about the house and helping in the hundred and one things that there are to be done even in the smallest household. These things bring forgetfulness, and with forgetfulness an imitation of happiness almost as good as the real thing, until the time comes to sit down with nothing to do but—think!

And she would be chatting pleasantly with the maid, too, while helping her with the work; for mistress and maid feel their common womanhood a very close bond, something infinitely stronger than ever exists between master and man.

Then there would come an unaccustomed ring

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at the bell. No one usually came at that hour of the morning; the butcher had already called for orders, and it was not yet time for the midday post. We saw the telegraph-girl propping her bicycle against the wall in the road, opening the gate, and walking up through the garden, that garden which we knew so well, every detail of it. Under the beech-tree and so along the path to the porch of the house. The girl had doubtless taken many other telegrams of the same sort to other houses before now, for she knew what to do, just thrust the hateful yellow envelope into the maid's hands without a word, and go back out into the road as quickly as possible.

And how the maid's hands trembled as she delivered the poisonous thing to her mistress before darting away hurriedly to her kitchen, only to check her footsteps and come back and stand outside the door; she knew; and thought her help might be wanted in a moment!

Then the tearing open of the envelope with nerveless fingers—the staring at the words with wild eyes that gradually became darkened; and the eternity that passed while the telegram fluttered slowly to the floor though the hands remained stiffly poised as though still holding it, and the unseeing eyes still stared at the nothing they held!

Easy enough to picture such scenes! Were they not common enough in these days for everyone to know down to the smallest detail?

But Myra must have felt comforted a little, as

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we felt not a little proud, on hearing how Trythall met his end, and how the *Windsor Castle* fought to the last.

From the very first moment of the action there was practically no chance whatever. Indeed from the moment when the smoke on the horizon was seen to be that of three German light cruisers it must have been known that the fight was bound to be a losing fight.

All thoughts were for the safety of the convoy. Directions were given that they were to scatter, so as to save some of them if not all. But the *Windsor Castle* and her consort must remain and fight, if only to delay the enemy cruisers long enough to enable the convoy ships to get away as far as they could; though naturally there was the hope of damaging, if not sinking, one or more of the enemy—one never knows what the fortune of war may bring forth.

But the convoy was the real reason for putting up a fight. Were it not for them the destroyers would have run for it; there is no sense in two destroyers imagining themselves a match for three light cruisers.

The issue was not long left in doubt. It could not be, of course.

A salvo came crashing into the side of the *Windsor Castle* disabling her machinery, and leaving her a helpless target.

Trythall's cheery voice came ringing along the deck in brave tones :

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“ Bless my heart, lads, we’re not done for yet ! There’s lots of fight left in the old packet ! ”

So the men—such as were left of them—turned to fight the ship again, stirred by the heartening words of their brave commander.

It was a fine effort, but it ended as it had to end. Even the Germans, one would like to believe, must have felt something of admiration and regret as they opened fire again to deal the *coup de grace*.

And our old messmate’s last words will be remembered as an uplifting message by many besides those who first heard them through the fire and smoke on the *Windsor Castle’s* deck :

“ Bless my heart, lads, we’re not done for yet ! ”

13

Reckon this just as one small item of the cost of keeping the Curtain in its place. There is a price to be paid, not in millions alone, but in lives, gallant young men’s lives, boys’ lives, and lives of sage veterans invaluable to the State ; and in broken hearts and stricken homes also.

Yes, this price must be paid, and paid continually, and I think one may say with confidence that it is paid cheerfully, ungrudgingly, on sea just as it is on land.

For—is it not well worth while ?

The name of “ The Curtain,” or rather “ The Safety Curtain,” is not one which I have applied to the Navy out of my own imagination ; it is one

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the men of the Navy have themselves appropriated to the Service to which they belong. Nor need you think that there is any trace of self-conceit or arrogance in their doing so ; it is only that they are clear-sighted enough to recognise two facts which a vast number of people do not appear to have visualised.

The first fact is that the Navy really has been, all through the war, the one thing which has effectually prevented the German plague from spreading its foul infection to—

To the shores of this dear country of ours ?

Not that alone. Though that in itself would be service enough to merit the name of a gigantic achievement ; and heaven only knows the abysmal depth of unthinking ingratitude of vast numbers of people in these islands who pursue their even way untroubled by the war, little realising from what they have been spared and still less grasping the fact that nothing on earth but the Navy alone has been their shield ; while, disappointed of the thrills to which they feel themselves justly entitled as taxpayers, and looking in vain in their daily paper for some dramatic story of a naval action, they want to know “ What is the Navy doing ? ”

No, it is not our own country's immunity alone that has earned for the Navy its proud title of The Safety Curtain. If this were all, then we might justly be accused of selfishly forgetting the miseries of those allied countries which have not shared the security of our sea-barrier.

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The deeper truth is that the Navy has been, and still is, a Safety-Curtain not merely between Germany and Great Britain, but between Germanism and Civilisation.

I wish some clever essayist would expand this simple fact and make a popular pamphlet out of it to be distributed by the million. It is a task that would be well worth doing, if someone could be found to tackle it, writing it so that the plain man could understand and the deep-learned highbrow who has inclined his ear to Germany's persuasive talk about the Freedom of the Seas might be led to reconsider his theories.

And the other fact which the sailor-man sees perhaps a little more clearly than the majority of other folk is that the Navy by itself alone is able to win this war.

To say this is not in any sense to belittle the magnificent achievements of those incomparable heroes, our soldiers; who, indeed, but a madman could dream of doing so? They need no encomium—it would be almost an impertinence to attempt one; their deeds speak for themselves.

But the fact remains that, *supposing* (to make the case as absurdly exaggerated as possible) our armies in every field were scattered and broken by the enemy; *supposing* that the Germans were free to overrun the whole of the continent of Europe to its farthest corner; *supposing* that Germany were able to feed her people from the conquered territories and to exact indemnities—even then, so long

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as the Navy remained intact and unbeaten, Germany would be forced, sooner or later, to disgorge every single one of her ill-gotten gains and to sue humbly for our terms of peace.

Because—to state the reason as briefly as possible—Germany and German trade *must* have an outlet to the outer world, and to this door the British Navy *holds the key*.

The rulers of Germany know this very well—only too well for their peace of mind ; and, make no mistake about it, beneath all their blustering, vain-glorious talk of invincible armies and shining swords and all the rest of their high-faluting nonsense, lies the brooding disquieting *knowledge* that until they have beaten our Navy they *cannot win this war*.

Some day the Curtain will rise ; that is certain, be the day near or far-off. And the scene on which it rises will be a happy scene of a broad and pleasant country-side ; of rich fields ripening in the sunshine, of peaceful homes, and flourishing industries ; of a contented, self-respecting people who have learnt through the chastening of war to sweep away for ever the old follies of inequalities of a former age and to share with one another the happy fruits of Victory.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

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